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- Johny Christ - Avenged Sevenfold

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- Juan Alderete - The Mars Volta

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CONTENTS

FEBRUARY 2014 | VOLUME 25, NUMBER 2 | BASSPLAYER.COM

DBSTW

26 **LEE ROCKER**
Having re-popularized slap upright with **the Stray Cats**, Rocker unleashed generations of doghouse-thwackers—becoming one of the most influential bassists in rock history. Includes two slap lessons. By Ed Friedland

38 **BASS PLAYER LIVE!**
One of the most memorable BPLs in recent history featured clinics, award presentations, and unforgettable performances. By Brian Fox

52 **HUNTER BURGAN**
Insights on live performance, tone, and synth-bass from **AFI**'s master of endurance. By Jon D'Auria

78 **MOUNTAIN'S "NANTUCKET SLEIGHRIDE"**
A whale of a bass line from early hard-rock giant **Felix Pappalardi**. By Freddy Villano & Brian Fox

Cover Photo: Bryan Beasley

ALEX KLUFT

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DEPARTMENTS

10 **COMMUNITY** The Real World, Dig My Rig, Court of Opinion
14 **EXPO** Bass Player Live concert!
24 **NEW GEAR** Products from F Bass, Hevos, Elrick & more
90 **BOBBY'S BASSMENT** A Jazz Bass with bite

BASS NOTES

16 **CHRIS BIERDEN** Plowing a trail with **Poliça**
17 **SAM BETTLEY** Into the deep end with **Asking Alexandria**
18 **REV JONES** Peaking with **Mountain** & **Leslie West**
20 **BP RECOMMENDS**

SOUNDROOM

60 **PEAVEY** Michael Anthony VB-MA head & 4x10 cab
64 **EPIFANI** Piccolo 600 head
68 **ULTIMATE EARS** UE 11 Pro custom in-ear monitors
70 **LA BELLA** RX Series strings

WOODSHED

72 **JAZZ CONCEPTS** The joy of 6ths
76 **BLUES YOU CAN USE** Willie's slap barrage

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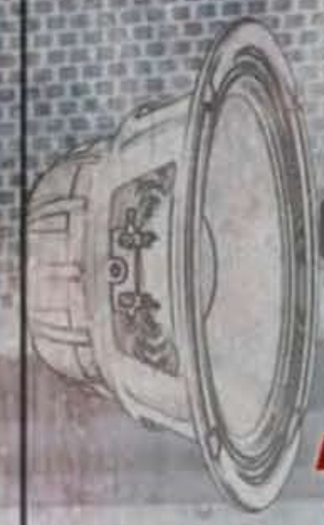

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COMMUNITY

LOWDOWN

BRIAN FOX

Have You Hugged Your Drummer Today?

IT'S BEEN MORE THAN A MONTH SINCE IT ALL WENT DOWN, BUT MY SKIN STILL CRAWLS when I think about it. Maybe you've been there: in need of a drummer, you post an ad on [insert website/bulletin board here]. You word your post in such a way that, without sounding insufferable, communicates that you're looking for a player of a certain caliber. You meet the first contestant. Not happenin'. You meet the next. Almost, but not quite. Third time's the charm, right? Right. . . .

Sympathetic to the drag that is schlepping a drum kit, you agree to meet at his/her house, just out of town. Dodging doggie-doo landmines in the side yard, you pass a rusted-out El Camino (truck-bed pool must have sprung a leak) and squeeze into a garage "studio" that smells of popcorn and feet. Nice enough guy/gal, though. Still hopefully optimistic, you set your rig next to the cleanest soundproofing-mattress you can find as your drummer/host assumes the throne. You hear the first *thwack* of the kick drum, and your heart sinks.

"Lock in with the drummer." After nearly 10 years working for BASS PLAYER, this phrase ranks #2 in my book of interview clichés (a distant second to "Serve the song," but that's another column). My conditioned response upon hearing it—an exasperated eye roll—has become such a problem that I've taken to wearing dark glasses for face-to-face interviews for fear of outing myself as the cynic I've become. Well, no more. It took 20 years of playing with good drummers to spoil me, and mere moments of playing with a poor one to make me learn my lesson. That lesson? You sound only as good as the weakest link in your rhythm section. I may have missed it in my personal Thanksgiving proclamations, but I now have a proper New Year's resolution: If you're sounding good, give your drummer some. After all, you might be that weakest link.

DIG MY RIG!

HERE IS A SHOT OF MY MUSICAL FAMILY. IT HAS evolved over the years, but I still love 'em all. From bottom left: NoName Guitars "Pete Langford" model acoustic bass guitar, Sakis Greek bouzouki, Paris Swing mandolin, Alvarez mandolin, Tacoma Papoose 12-string, Kala U-Bass, Godin 5th Avenue archtop acoustic guitar, and an Augustino LoPrinzi guitar. On the floor: 1983 Fender Precision and Squier P-Bass. The uprights, left to right: New Standard bass, Eminence Portable 5-string, and Chadwick folding bass. On the couch: Martin Backpacker mandolin, Fender Roscoe Beck 5, Fender '64 Jazz Reissue, Modulus M92 5-string, Fender 60th anniversary P-Bass, G&L SB-1, Carvin SB4000. —PETE LANGFORD

Got a rig you think we'd dig? Send a photo and description to digmyrig@gmail.com.

COURT OF OPINION

What will your next gear purchase be?

Join the conversation at facebook.com/bassplayermag.

A drummer that doesn't end up slowing down?
—Tony Ketz

We would be satisfied with just *having* a drummer!
—John Skrypnyk

An Ibanez BTB 7-string is on my wish list.
—Juan Zamora Fernandez

A lighter rig, possibly an Ampeg or Orange. Gotta go test driving!
—Christopher L. Parr

A lighter bass. 'cause my back can't take the weight of my old Fender P-Bass.
—Ady Ingleby

After playing the StingRay for 20 years, I'm goin' for the lighter, more nimble Ibanez SR500. The StingRay will still always be my #1! **—Brooks Davis**

A fourth Kramer aluminum-neck monster!
—Mike Klausman

MORE PEDALS! I can never have enough!
—Mike Hale

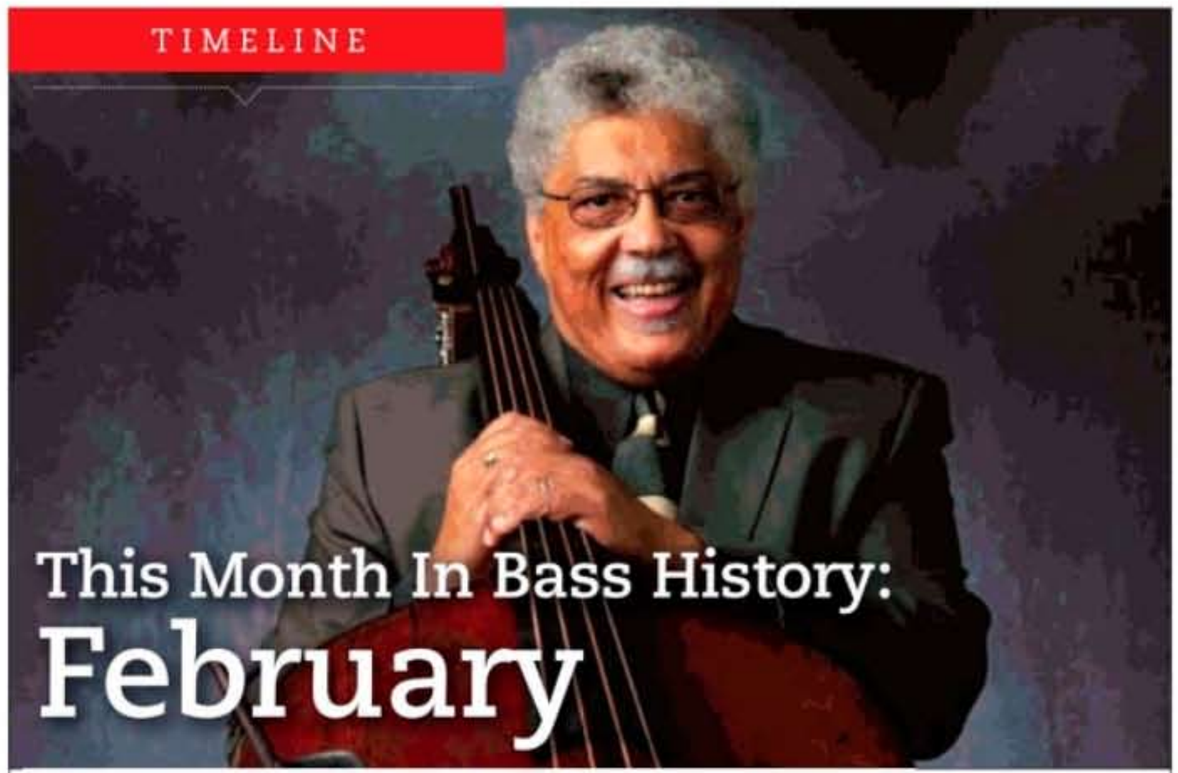
A 5-string. I hate to do it because I can do a gig on two strings, but I love the ease.
—Edwin C. Dies

A Wal bass.
—Bart Witek

I'd like to sell a few of my basses and use the money for a Sandberg!
—Joe Salesi

A Bass Player subscription!
—Todd Glock

TIMELINE



This Month In Bass History: February

2nd Sid Vicious dies of a heroin overdose, **1979**.

3rd Nigel Harrison's bass part is the just the thing for Blondie's U.K. No. 1 "Heart of Glass," **1979**.

4th The Bee Gees' "Stayin' Alive," bolstered by a Maurice Gibb bass line, takes over the charts, **1978**.

6th Danny Klein's work on J. Geils Band's "Centerfold" is tops, **1982**.

7th John Entwistle and the Who record "Pinball Wizard," **1969**. John Paul Jones and the boys are tops in the U.K. with *Led Zeppelin II*, **1970**. Tony Levin's mind-meld with drummer Steve Gadd takes Paul Simon's "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover" to the top, **1976**. Robert "Kool" Bell & the Gang rule the charts with "Celebration," **1981**.

8th The Ohio Players and Marshall "Rock" Jones have a No. 1 single with "Fire," **1975**.

9th Multi-instrumentalist, bandleader, and Count Basie bass man Walter Page born, **1900**.

10th Educator, bandleader, and sideman Rufus Reid born, **1944**. Metallica bass legend Cliff Burton born, **1962**. Original Stooges bassist Dave Alexander dies from pneumonia, **1975**.

12th Producer, bassist, and label head Bill Laswell born, **1955**. Al Green's "Let's Stay Together," blessed with a Leroy Hodges bass line, is No. 1, **1972**.

13th Geezer Butler and Black Sabbath release their self-titled debut, **1970**.

15th Larry Graham's slap bass part helps push Sly & the Family Stone's "Everyday People" to the top of the charts, **1969**. Glen Matlock is fired by the Sex Pistols and replaced by Sid Vicious, **1977**.

17th Thirteen years before he makes the move, Bill Wyman declares his intention to leave the Rolling Stones, **1980**.

18th Carol Kaye lays down her immortal bass line for the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations," **1966**.

19th Colin Pattendon grooves Manfred Mann's Earth Band's "Blinded by the Light," written by Bruce Springsteen, right to the top of the charts, **1977**.

21st Otis Redding's "(Sittin' On) the Dock of the Bay," with its groovy Donald "Duck" Dunn bass line, is No. 3 in the U.K., **1968**. The Four Seasons' Don Ciccone's bass and vocals are featured in the No. 1 U.K. hit "December, 1963 (Oh, What a Night)," **1975**. Fleetwood Mac and John McVie release their masterpiece *Rumours*, **1977**.

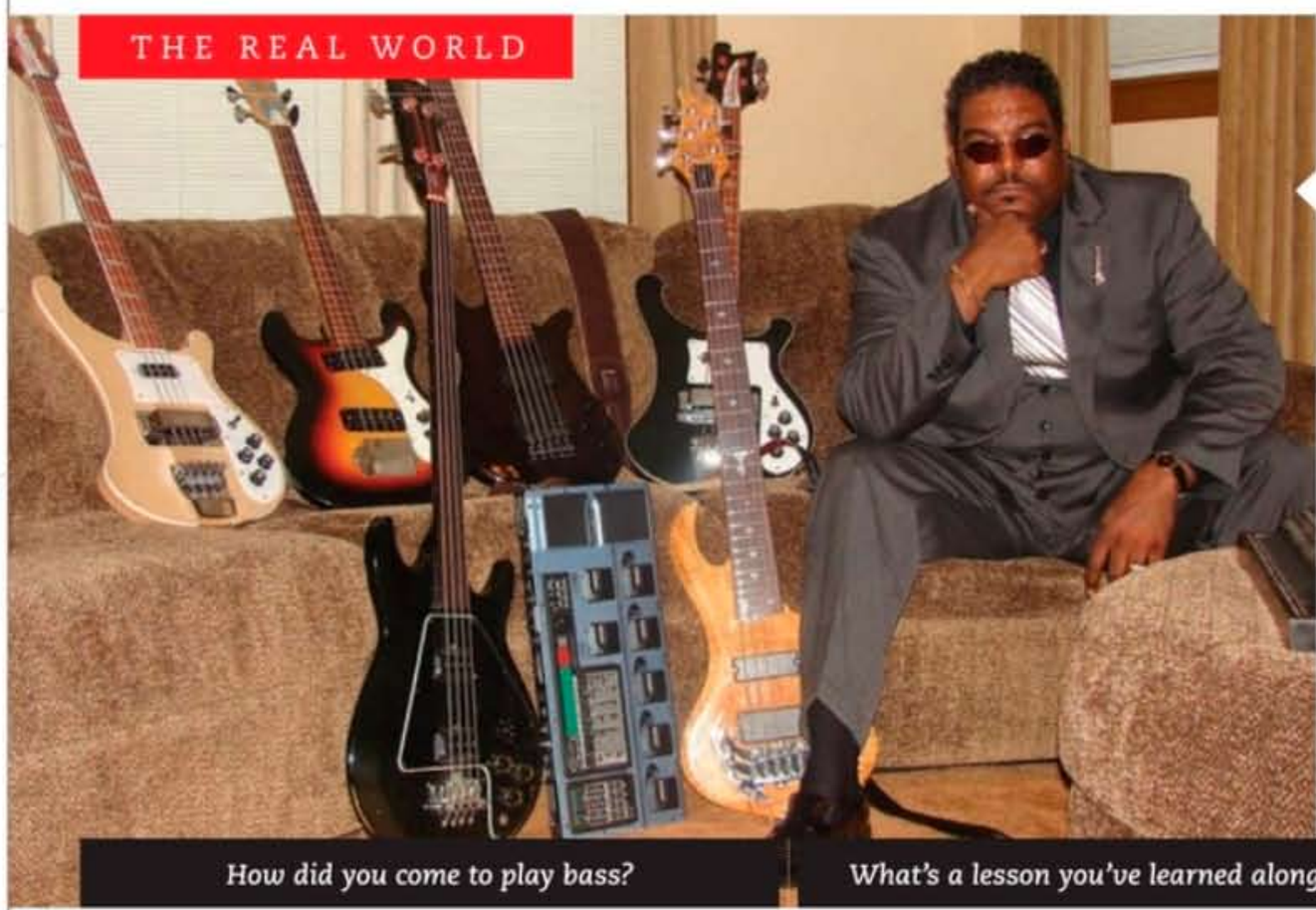
22nd Roger Waters and Paul McCartney are both recording at Abbey Road Studios—Waters for Pink Floyd's *Piper at the Gates of Dawn* sessions, and McCartney for *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, **1967**. Alan Gorrie's perfect bass part helps push Average White Band's "Pick Up the Pieces" to the top of the charts, **1975**.

23rd Suzi Quatro hits No. 1 in the U.K. with "Devil Gate Drive," **1974**.

24th Roberta Flack's "Killing Me Softly With His Song," adorned with a Ron Carter bass line, hits No. 1, **1973**.

26th The Beatles' *Rubber Soul* album hits No.1 in the U.S., **1966**.

THE REAL WORLD



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Strings Ken Smith, Rotosound, Elixir
Heroes & inspiration Larry Graham, Chris Squire, Les Claypool, Stanley Clarke, Jaco Pastorius, Alphonso Johnson, Jesus Christ
Contact rockbassrt@aol.com

How did you come to play bass?

I was an early bass freak—I made a guitar into a bass. After learning the viola as a kid, I was drawn to the bass.

What's a lesson you've learned along the way?

Play to improve your mind and artistic knowledge.

What are your musical goals?

To get good management and great gigs.

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-John Patitucci

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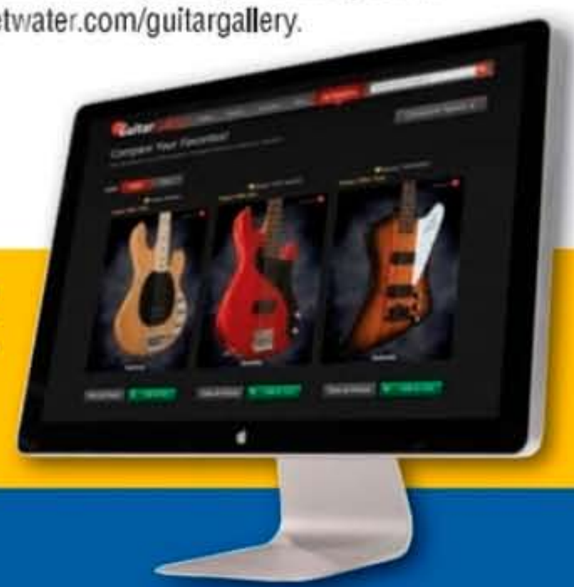

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BRYAN BEASLEY

Guns Blazing

Backed by a lethal lineup that included drummer Steve Ferrone (Average White Band) and keys man Benmont Tench (Tom Petty), Tal Wilkenfeld storms the stage at L.A.'s Fonda Theatre after accepting her Young Gun Award (presented by Sadowsky) at Bass Player LIVE!, November 9, 2013.

BASS NOTES

POLIÇA

Chris Bierden

Polyrhythmic Pocket

BY JON D'AURIA

CHRIS BIERDEN IS THE FIRST TO ADMIT HE'S HIT THE BASS PLAYER'S jackpot with Poliça. The Minnesota alternative trip-hop band's 2012 debut album, *Give You the Ghost*, gained critical acclaim, thrust the group onto big touring bills with Bon Iver, and landed them key slots on the festival circuit. Along with an effects-driven vocalist and two highly technical drummers, the result is a bass-driven sound where Bierden takes the rhythmic and melodic lead by picking his way through funky grooves and rubbery fills and belting his falsetto vocals. On Poliça's latest album, *Shulamith*, Bierden's role is even more dominant than before, as he takes his sense of countermelody to the next level while bottoming out with an even deeper tone. Whether his muted picking attack is plowing the trail ahead or if he falls deep into the pocket of his drum team's polyrhythmic grooves, Bierden's bass is always the glue that holds everything together.

You're in a unique situation, being the only stringed instrument in your band.

I describe it as a bass player's dream, because I get free rein to play the countermelodies of what Channy [Leaneagh] is singing and the counter-rhythm to what our two drummers [Drew Christopherson and Ben Ivascu] are doing. I get to do whatever I want, so it's an ideal outfit for a bassist to play in. I'm very lucky.

How do you approach playing with two drummers?

A lot of the heart and soul of a band falls into the drummer's style, so to play with two drummers with two very distinct styles is amazing. As a bass player, I do have to be mindful of how many beats are going on and which rhythm to latch onto. It can also become a battle of the low end with two kick drums and a lot of low tom work. We have to really make sure we're playing together or it can be too much.

Did you dial in your tone differently on this album?

I love great bass tone, but I'm not a tone junkie at all; in fact, I have more questions than answers on the topic. But I recently acquired a '76 Precision Bass, and it sounded beautiful on this album. We wanted to make my bass a little dubbier this time around, so we rounded up the low end and rolled off the rest. And this is the first album where I used reverb and chorus pedals, which really enhanced my sound.

Describe your playing technique in Poliça.

I've always been a pick player and I love to palm-mute, so I usually play pretty close to the bridge. It does change my tone quite a bit and I get more of the mids from playing at that position. Picking is not always the most ideal tone for this band, because I'll want something deeper or wider, but I can usually get away with it by tweaking my amp. The band has a fairly bluesy undertone, so I usually stay in a pentatonic range with my playing. I get to do a lot of fun blues scales and runs, but I like to mix it up. I like baroque playing on bass.

How do come up with all of those bass fills?

A lot of times I catch myself doing things and I don't know where they're coming from, and other times I'll think to do something just a second before I do it. I see a lot of patterns on the bass, and I'll spontaneously experiment with them for fills. A lot of times I'm hearing my fills for the first time when I play them. It's half playing what I hear, and it's half my fingers going where they want to go. **BP**

INFO

LISTEN

Poliça, *Shulamith* [Mom + Pop, 2013]

EQUIP

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Strings DR Strings Sunbeam Mediums
Effects Boss RV-5 Digital Reverb, Boss CEB-3 Bass Chorus, ZVex Mastotron Fuzz

ASKING ALEXANDRIA

Sam Bettley
Getting Up To Speed

BY JIMMY LESLIE

"I STARTED PLAYING BASS WHEN I JOINED ASKING ALEXANDRIA IN 2008," REVEALS Sam Bettley, who had played guitar for years. "The opportunity came to broaden my horizons, so I picked up the bass and threw myself in the deep end." Bettley's challenge was to get his bass chops up to speed with the U.K. metalcore outfit's energetic approach, and he drew hard-hitting inspiration from the likes of Lemmy, Cliff Burton, Steve Harris, and Slipknot's Paul Grey. Bettley is a pickstyle player, and he dug in hard to produce his aggressive tone on Asking Alexandria's new CD, *From Death to Destiny*.

How do you get ready for a gig or a session?

I start with a few simple wrist and finger stretches before following along with James [Cassells, drums], as he warms up with some rudiments on his practice pad. After about ten minutes, I'll sit down on my own and run chromatic walks from the 12th fret up and down the neck to a click a few times, systematically increasing the tempo. It hurts after a while, but it stretches out all the muscles and tendons in the fretting hand.

Do you favor certain regions of the neck?

I'm most comfortable in the middle. I will skip to the next string instead of moving up a particular string in order to make fast riff flow more easily, but I'll do the opposite on a chorus. I love the warmer tone of the lower strings, and I slide my fretting hand all the way up and down the fingerboard if needed. I try to utilize all of my fingers. I've seen bassists who tend to forget they have four digits, and they get tripped up trying to do too much with too few fingers. After I play a series of chromatic walks, my hand kills because I work my entire hand, stretching it out as far as I can in an effort to make my playing as liquid as possible.

What picking techniques have you developed for playing fast?

When I play something really fast and constant, I don't use my wrist at all. I use my thumb and index finger, and my hand barely moves. It looks weird—almost like I'm scribbling something with a pen. I use a 1mm Dunlop Tortex Triangle pick; it doesn't make playing fast any easier, but if the pick slips in the grip of my sweaty hand, I can quickly flip it to one of the identical corners.

Do you have any advice for players working on getting their picking up to speed?

Slightly slice the strings with your pick, using some of the flat side instead of hitting the string directly with the pick's point. Once you get that down, over time you can slowly start turning your pick to a right angle. That's what I did, and it worked great. **BP**

INFO

LISTEN

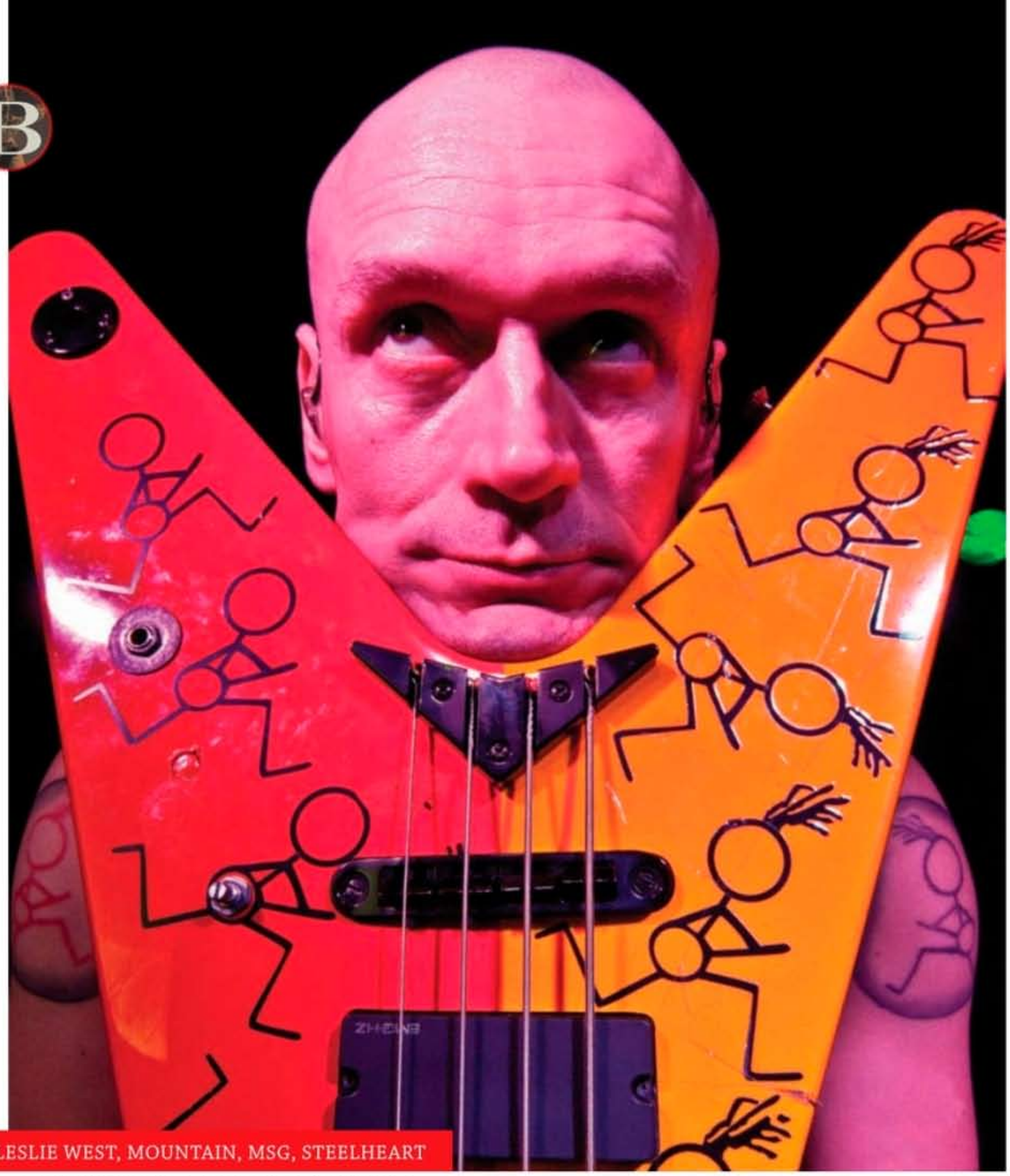
Asking Alexandria, *From Death to Destiny* [Sumerian, 2013]

EQUIP

Basses Custom prototype Schecter Sam Bettley Signature
Strings Ernie Ball Nickel Wound custom gauge (.060, .080, .095, .125) tuned *BF♯BE*
Rig Two Peavey Tour 700 heads, Peavey VB-810 8x10 cabinet, Tech 21 SansAmp RBI
Effects Maxon DS830 Distortion Master, Dunlop 105Q Bass Wah
Insight "My secret weapon is the SansAmp RBI rackmount—it boosts my signal and gives me the attack required for AA's style of music."

CONNECT

Watch Asking Alexandria's official videos for "Killing You" and "The Death of Me." **bassplayer.com/february2014**



LESLIE WEST, MOUNTAIN, MSG, STEELHEART

Rev Jones Mountain Climbing

BY FREDDY VILLANO | PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN DENTON

SINCE FIRST PICKING UP A BASS in 1985, Rev Jones has gone on to infuse some of the biggest names in hard rock with incredible energy and musicality, utilizing an array of techniques, both conventional and otherwise. Jones recently completed a tour of Indonesia with Steelheart, one of his main gigs, and is planning to embark upon a U.S. tour with another steady employer, guitarist Michael Schenker. He's also been playing bass with Leslie West for several years, and recently wrapped up work on the Mountain guitarist's latest, *Still Climbing*.

Who inspired the two-handed tapping techniques you use?

My biggest influence is Tony Levin. His choice of notes—that's the cool stuff to me. With King Crimson, some of the bass lines seem easy, but they're very odd. He could have played [technical] parts to blow everybody away, but instead just played in a way that was quirky and musical.

How did *Still Climbing* come together?

The first song I recorded was "When a Man Loves a Woman," and it was just me, Leslie, and a piano—no drums. I laid down the bass in one take, thinking it was just a going to be a scratch track, but that's the bass that ended up on the record. They went back and replayed the piano to match the bass and then added everyone else. There was no click—I was keeping time. It really set the vibe.

How do you come up with your bass parts?

I like to play fills that are more like passing

INFO

LISTEN

Leslie West, *Still Climbing* [2013, Mascot]

EQUIP

Basses Dean Guitars Custom Rev Cadillac, Custom ML, Demonator, Hollywood Z, Pace Bass; Warr Guitars custom 12-string touch bass (fretted/fretless hybrid)
Rig Phil Jones D-600 and D-200 heads; Phil Jones C4 Red & C4 Black 4x5 cabinets
Effects Maxon Vintage Jet Riser, Stereo Chorus Pro, OD808 Overdrive, AD-9 Pro Analog Delay; TWA Great Divide Multi-Voice Octaver
Strings Ernie Ball Hybrid Slinky Nickel Round Wound (.045–.105 and .032–.130); Ernie Ball Flatwound (.045–.105)
Picks Intune GrippX Standard 1mm
Accessories Kahler Bass Bridges and Bass Tremolos; Sennheiser EW 300 IEM G2 wireless system; Ultimate Ears UE-10 in-ear monitors

CONNECT

Check out Jones playing a solo with Mountain in 2009. **bassplayer.com/february2014**

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Rev Jones continued

phrases; they don't jump out at you, but without them, a song would sound empty. Chuck Jacobs from Kenny Rogers' band is one of those guys you don't notice unless you decide to really listen to the bass part. Some of those Kenny Rogers songs have amazing bass lines. Jacobs has that older, Nashville-style feel, but you can hear a James Jamerson influence. He's like a country version of a Motown guy.

What's your approach to playing the classic material with Leslie, whether it's Mountain or West, Bruce & Laing?

There are only a couple songs that I sat and learned because they had to be exact. Most of the time, I'm hearing in my head what those guys would have played. If I went and played on something that Greg Lake played on, it would sound just like I was playing his bass parts, even if I didn't learn the song note-for-note.

You claim your basses never go out of tune. How is that possible?

I only give each string three-quarters of a wrap around the tuning peg, so they don't stretch out. I usually don't even check my tuning during the show; unless the tuning keys got hit, it'll be in tune.

Can you offer any practice tips?

You don't need a metronome to develop your timing. It's good if you're trying to speed something up or you're trying to learn some weird little parts, but if you have to rely on a metronome to practice, it'd be like somebody always telling you, "Play that note, now play this one," without ever learning the notes for yourself. Eventually they won't be there and you'll be going, "Now what do I do?" I never even owned a metronome. Records were my metronome when I was learning how to play. **BP**

BP RECOMMENDS

KAI ECKHARDT
ZEITGEIST [kaizone.com]

Add Berkeley badass **Kai Eckhardt** to the list of boundary-busting Bay Area bassists that includes Jack Casady, Larry Graham, Rocco Prestia, Paul Jackson, and Michael Manring. On his soaring sophomore solo CD (his first in 13 years), Kai channels the Eastern-undertoned insight gained as a sideman with John McLaughlin, Billy Cobham, Trilok Gurtu, and his co-billed role as a member of Garaj Mahal into a far-reaching but focused musical statement, further sharpened by his super-tight quartet (Osam Ezzeldin on keys, drummer Dana Hawkins, and guitarist Chris Paul Robinson). Opening with a flurry of harmonics and an R&B-rooted, odd-time ostinato, "Seven Cows" journeys from fuze to jazz, with a stop for Kai's fierce fretless solo, capped by his *konnakol* vocals. Further instrumental gold can be found on "The Wake-Up Call," built around Kai's ridiculous and relentless slap part, and his bouncing finger-funk figure on "Chester the Pester" (a leaner, harder-swinging take than his Garaj Mahal version).

On the vocal side, Kai sings and delivers spoken word to "Worm," an Oteil-esque, bluesy jam-band nod to the simple life form; the atmospheric "From the North to the South," inspired by a spiritual invocation; and "Chase," an edgy rebuttal to the Wall Street mob. Finally, in pure fingerboard terms, there's "KK Express," a landmark bass and *kathak* (a form of Indian classical dance) duet with Kaveri Agashe, and "Giant Slaps," a killer culmination of Kai's two-handed chordal slapping technque, decades in the making, using the Coltrane standard as a template for what he refers to as his "3D sound." Call it "bassgeist" at its finest. —CHRIS JISI

MOTÖRHEAD
AFTERSHOCK
[UDR GmbH]

On the 21st studio recording from metal bass master **Lemmy Kilmister** and Motörhead, the celebrated rockers go back to their roots on an album that pays homage to their blues-rock influence while still remaining heavy. The opening track, "Heartbreaker," shows Lemmy's speed-metal prowess as his Rickenbacker 4001 burns through a barrage of angry riffs. The power trio then shifts to the Southern delta on "Lost Woman Blues," proving that Lemmy hasn't lost a step over the span of his long career. —JON D'AURIA

BROKEN BELLS
AFTER THE DISCO
[Columbia]

You could call it post-disco, but don't let the title fool you; **Danger Mouse** and **James Mercer** were bound to get a tad cheeky with their sophomore collaboration—it's just in their nature. Both multi-instrumentalists, they share the bass duties throughout, but they're at their best over a catchy backbeat, especially on the rather disco-fied title track (with a bass line straight out of Janice-Marie Johnson's chops catalog) and the compression-crunched "No Matter What You're Told." It's retro, and it still rules. —BILL MURPHY

MOGWAI
RAVE TAPES [Sub Pop]

Not content to be the elder statesmen of the Glasgow post-rock scene, the five regulators of Mogwai have diversified into soundtracks (most recently for the French TV series *Les Revenants*)—a move that underpins their latest album. **Dominic Aitchison** provides the immovable anchor to moody songs that take on a darker electronic edge than past outings, from the sci-fi chrome chiller "Unmurdered" to the Moroder-esque ballad "The Lord Is Out of Control." —BILL MURPHY

ARCADE FIRE
REFLEKTOR [Merge]

With so many sonic ingredients in this double set—from Haitian carnival music to Thompson Twins-y electropop—it's not surprising that three band members shared bass duties. **Richard Reed Parry** goes dub-style on "Flashbulb Eyes," **Win Butler**

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provides low-end stutter on "Here Comes the Night Time," and **Tim Kingsbury**'s offbeat gut punches enliven "It's Never Over (Hey Orpheus)." —MAC RANDALL

THE NAKED AND FAMOUS
IN ROLLING WAVES
[Somewhat Damaged]
David Beadle and his Auckland, New Zealand synthpop outfit is back with a sophomore effort that favors ambient soundscapes over the upbeat, dance vibe of their debut album. Beadle does induce a steady head-nod throughout the record by blending deep synth and electric frequencies to create a booming tone that helps perpetuate the undeniable moodiness. His sonic depth is especially impressive on the tracks "Waltz" and "Rolling Waves," where he carries the rhythm under melodic vocals. —JON D'AURIA

WARPAINT
WARPAINT [Rough Trade]
It's worth repeating: L.A.'s Warpaint is an all-female lineup that shows the boys how it's done. Produced by two blokes named Flood and Nigel Godrich, Warpaint's latest is a spacey mix of art-pop and rock, with **Jenny Lee Lindberg** and drummer Stella Mozgawa laying down grooves that kill. Taking her full-toned Ricky 4001 into syncopated jaunts (especially on the trippy, hard-driving "Keep It Healthy") is Lindberg's forte, and she flaunts it like Simenon, Greenwood, Clayton—take your pick. —BILL MURPHY

CUT COPY
FREE YOUR MIND [Modular]
Cut Copy is taking indie-electronica up a few notches on the band's fourth studio album, thanks to the bouncing and pulsating bass work of **Ben Browning**. Where many bassists of the genre get blown out of the water due to overpowering synth bass, Browning clearly dominates the low end with his warm-toned lines on dance gems such as "In Memory Capsule" and "We Are Explorers." Browning proves that nothing beats the genuine article of electric bass in any genre. —JON D'AURIA **BP**

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Street $25

Contact ghsstrings.com

TAKAMINE
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Takamine's GB30CE and GB72CE acoustic bass guitars sport solid spruce tops, 21-fret necks with 16" fingerboard radius, and Takamine TK-40B electronics with onboard tuning. The GB30CE, which boasts mahogany back and sides, comes in a gloss natural or gloss black finish, while the GB72CE and its flame-maple back and sides is available in a gloss natural or gloss sunburst finish.

Street GB30CE, $500; GB72CE, $600

Contact takamine.com

POSITIVE GRID
BIAS Amplifier Modeler & Designer App for iPad

BIAS, the new app from the folks who brought us JamUp Pro XT for iOS, comes equipped with 36 amp models, including four bass amps: Blue Line (based on the 1969 Ampeg SVT), GK 800 (based on Gallien-Krueger's 800RB head), AD 20 (based on the Orange AD200), and Super Bass (based on the Fender Super Bassman). The app also features the 2x10 Bass Pro (based on SWR Golight Jr. 2x10), the 4x10 Bass GK (based on a G-K 4x10), the 6x10 Bass Blue (based on Ampeg SVT 6x10), and the 8x10 Bass Super (based on the Fender Super Bassman 8x10).

Download $20

Contact positivegrid.com

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Like Elrick's Expat New Jazz Standard basses, Expat e-volution basses feature U.S. Bartolini pickups and electronics, as well as hardware by Hipshot, including the exclusive Elrick bridge. Select swamp-ash bodies, matching wood control covers, and three-piece maple necks with wenge fingerboards complete the package.

Street $2,500

Contact elrick.com

MXR

M81 Bass Preamp

MXR adds another winner to its Bass Innovations line with the M81, which combines a bass preamp with a DI in a Phase 90-size box. The Bass Preamp features separate input and output level controls, a 3-band EQ section with sweepable midrange, a pre/post EQ switch, and a ground lift. The M81 is factory preset to operate in buffered bypass with both the EQ section and DI section active, but players can use just the EQ section by flipping an internal switch that disables the DI and engages true-bypass mode.

Street $170

Contact jimdunlop.com

F BASS

VF-P Bass

With its 34" scale, two-piece alder body, 21 frets, slab maple neck and fingerboard, volume/tone controls, and '64 Precision-inspired Aguilar AG 4P-60 pickup, F Bass's passive, 8-pound homage to the P-Bass hits all the classic notes. Options include chrome covers for the pickup and bridge, modern or classic neck shapes, a choice of finishes and pickguard colors, chrome or black plastic knobs, and a rosewood fingerboard.

Street $3,500

Contact fbass.com

HEVOS

400S Compact Bass Amp & 2×6 Combo

Netherlands-based Hevos' 400S head and 2x6 combo amps share several similarities: Both 4Ω, 400-watt amps have two input sections, mute switches for silent tuning, 4-band EQ sections, headphone outputs, and XLR line-outs that can be set for pre- or post-EQ. The 400S head weighs 4.4 pounds, while the 2x6 weighs in at 30 pounds.

Street 400S, $1,140; 2x6, $1,775

Contact hevos.nl

2×6 Combo

400S Compact Bass Amp

BUILT FOR SPEED

THREE DECADES AFTER SPARKING THE ROCKABILLY REVIVAL WITH THE STRAY CATS, **LEE ROCKER** PLOWS AHEAD.

IN NOVEMBER 2013, AT BASS PLAYER LIVE!, Lee Rocker received a BASS PLAYER Lifetime Achievement Award Presented by Ampeg for his contributions to the world of music and bass. These days, it's not uncommon to see a popular group anchored by the mighty doghouse, but back in 1982—the year "Stray Cat Strut" broke on the U.S. airwaves—the electric bass had long ruled the lower realms (a reign soon to be threatened by the onslaught of the dreaded synth-bass). The Stray Cats contrasted the keyboard-heavy pop scene with their 1950s-era simplicity: a string bass, a guitar, and a drum. With a deep love of the rockabilly tradition laid down by Carl Perkins, Johnny Burnette, Elvis Presley, Eddie Cochran, Wanda Jackson, and many others, the trio of photogenic kids from Long Island brought twangy guitars, delay-soaked vocals, jungle drums, and upright bass back to the mainstream with a raved-up,

BY ED FRIEDLAND

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEX KLUFT

punked-out twist. Once again, teens around the world bopped their heads to the whacka-whacka rhythm of slap upright—this time, courtesy of Lee Rocker.

The slap style was not new; it can be traced as far back as the 1910s, and the first Victor recordings of Steve Brown slapping with the Jean Goldkette Orchestra happened in 1926 (the first time it was discovered that slap bass sells records). The attention-grabbing technique has always had its practitioners in jazz, bluegrass, blues, and rockabilly music—but whether it was simply through luck, timing, hard work, or all the above, Lee Rocker became the guy who made playing the upright bass cool again. Standing on his bass during the hit MTV video for "Rock This Town," a new generation (and a few since) witnessed the classic show-stopping move for the first time. But underneath the theatrics was his solid playing with an incessant, in-the-pocket feel that had just enough frenzy to drive the cats and kitties wild. While the Stray Cats recordings were well produced and their MTV image well crafted, their live shows had the raucous energy and abandon of punk, with guitarist Brian Setzer running amok, Slim Jim Phantom taking full advantage of playing drums while standing, and a pompadoured Lee Rocker slapping the hell out of his upright through an Ampeg SVT. The genetics of all punk/rockabilly hybrid strains can be traced back to the Stray Cats, and the modern interest in slap upright bass to Mr. Rocker.

More than 30 years later, Lee is still playing the early rock & roll/country blend that turned him on as a teen. His most recent CD, *Night Train to Memphis*, features classics like "That's All Right Mama," "Honey Don't," "Rockabilly Boogie," the Stray Cat favorite "Built for Speed," and Rocker's own "Slap the Bass." Featuring guitarists Buzz Campell and Brophy Dale and Jimmy Sage on drums, Rocker's longtime touring band exhibits the relaxed authority that comes from years of playing together, and full immersion in the style. Rocker's bass sounds punchy and full, with a healthy dose of natural ambience that creates the feeling of being in the room with him. The groove is unstoppable, and the walking lines are generously peppered with percussive triplet runs that careen like a chopped '32 Ford taking a corner at 100 MPH.

Rocker's vocals are often overshadowed by his playing, but his phrasing is dead on, and his pleasing vocal quality sounds at home whether shouting out "Wild Child" or crooning through "All I Have to Do Is Dream." And, he does it while fronting the band and slapping the bass. His performance at November's BASS PLAYER LIVE! was a rockin' romp through many of the tracks from *Night Train to Memphis*, and climaxed with Rocker being joined onstage by Brian Bromberg, Carlitos Del Puerto, John B. Williams, and Miles Mosley for a smoking five-upright bass jam on "Rockabilly Boogie." We checked in with Lee post-BPL and spoke about the CD, his past, present, and future, as well as his love for music and the bass.

In a good way, *Night Train* feels like an old record.

These are songs I've been playing my whole life, and I wanted to put them down in that real way, with everyone playing in the same room, facing each other. There were a handful of overdubs maybe, but it was very much an old-school recording—and while we did use Pro Tools, because that's what it is now, in this instance we used it more like a tape machine than a "device." And, it didn't take long; it was one of the least agonizing records I've ever made. When we made our first Stray Cats record, there were a lot of years of playing as a band in bars to prepare for that, and *Night Train to Memphis* is similar.

Your bass sound is natural and full. How did you capture that?

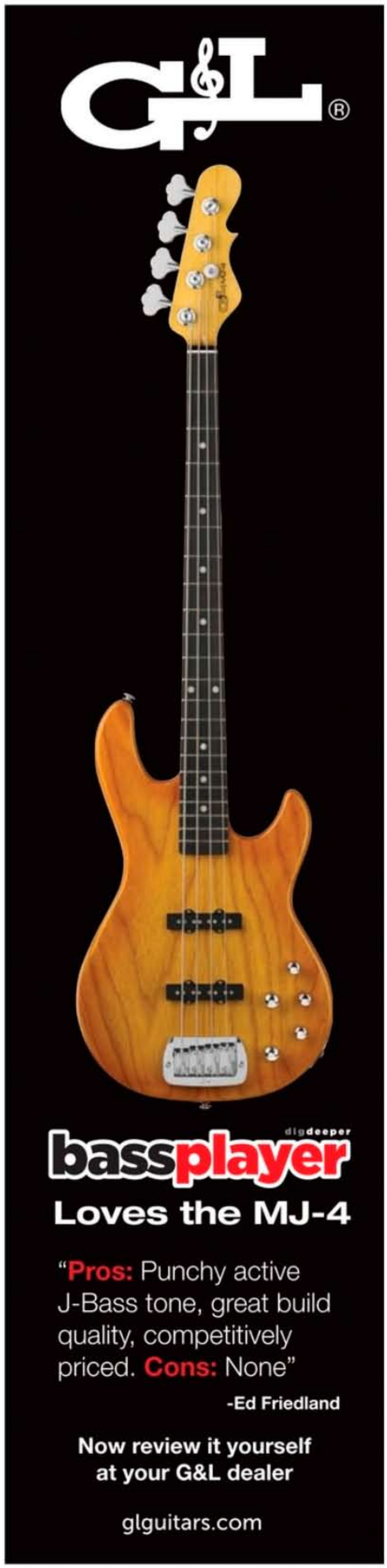
I generally run a few tracks of bass, and depending on whether I'm playing steel strings with a magnetic pickups or the guts with a transducer, I run a DI from the pickup, mic the amp, and put a mic in front of the *f*-hole on the bass. But this record was very organic, very live; it's 90 percent microphone with a hair of DI in there. Mostly, I played my Kolstein Lee Rocker "Tuxedo" model bass; it's a ¾-size instrument with a Planet Wing pickup and strung with Efrano guts. For this record, that was the sound that served the song.

So, you choose the bass and type of setup to match different music?

I always look for the right tool, the right sound to use. On this record, we had more of an acoustic element: We used a lot of acoustic guitar for rhythm, and I pulled the drums back a little, so I like to use gut strings for that. The CD I'm working on now is more of a rock record, and I'm using mostly steel strings [Jargar Mediums] and an amp. When you compete with more aggressive drums, you need to match that with something.

Talking about competing with drums, how do you manage the rhythm section when playing slap?

I like the drummer to give me some space. They can play more than just the basics, but they have to leave me some room. And while I don't work with



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piano players often, when I do, we have a discussion about the left hand—who's going to be down there. But ultimately, it all comes down to the particular song. When it's my thing, I get to make that call, but if I'm doing a session for someone else, I'm happy to do whatever they're thinking of.

Have you done much session work?

Not much lately. A large amount of the session work I did was with Carl Perkins; I played on his last album before he died, *Go Cat Go*, but we had gone in the studio before that with Slim Jim and Dave Edmunds as well.

There's some video online of you and Carl with Eric Clapton and Ringo Starr.

That was a fantastic show we did in England. Carl was just an incredible talent, the architect, and undoubtedly one of the most important people in all of rock & roll history. I feel very privileged to have known him, and I miss him; we were good friends.

Was there a rockabilly scene when you were coming up as a player with Stray Cats?

In the suburbs of New York, there wasn't. There were a few hipsters in the city who knew about it, and we'd go in to play at CBGB or Max's Kansas City, or some of the suburban joints, but nobody knew "Blue Moon of Kentucky." It was just the energy, and the passion—the band connected. It was a phenomenon that happened very quickly. One week we'd play and there'd be 12 people, the next week it was 300. When we moved to England, there wasn't a rockabilly scene; there was a music scene that was really diverse. There was Motörhead, Ray Davies, the Pretenders, the Clash, Madness, the whole Two-Tone thing, the punks and the skinheads—it was all going on at the same time. What we were doing was just one extreme of it. The English audience that was interested in rockabilly, the "Teddy Boys"—they were not fans of ours. They treated rockabilly like it was a museum piece that you dust off and recreate.

Did you try to emulate the 1950s sound?

As much as I listened to the old records, I never thought about trying to copy them. Those original records were so fantastic, but the musicians didn't work it all out; they just played it. The next time they played it, it came out differently. It's like jazz in that way. I like to get the gist of something, the meat of it, and then do my thing to it. It can be really interesting to dissect something perfectly, but I also think, especially for a young player, that it's important to understand what's going on and then put your stamp on it.

What was the first tune you heard that made

The Stray Cats in their heyday: (L–R) Rocker, Brian Setzer, Slim Jim Phantom

you want to play slap bass?

I think it was "That's Alright Mama" by Elvis, and "Blue Moon of Kentucky," which was the B-side. It's one of those sounds that's in the fabric of American music. There was a jukebox at either Max's or CBGB, and hearing that song played there just blew me away. There are no drums on that record; it's just the bass providing the propulsion with the jingle-y acoustic guitar, and the electric guitar. That's where it all started, and to this day, those tunes are always in my show.

Which player influenced you the most?

Willie Dixon was the guy! I saw him play when I was a teenager, and it was mind-blowing.

Have you checked out his line on Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode"?

Yes! It's not what you'd think—it is intricate, fantastic playing. [*Note: Flip back to the Holiday '13 issue for a Blues You Can Use column dedicated to that tune.*] Another track people should check out is a lesser-known Chuck Berry hit called "Beautiful Delilah," with a fantastic bass line. Willie was a guy with an overview, as a producer, writer, and a phenomenal bass player—he could see the forest and the trees in terms of a song.

Maybe the first bassist/producer?

The role of bass player puts you in an ideal position to produce records—you're always dealing with structure for one thing, rhythm, the relationship with the drums, and how everything fits together.

Another player who had a big influence on me was Ray Brown; I love his walking lines. I went through his book [*Ray Brown's Bass Method*, Hal Leonard] and spent time analyzing his bass lines. Bass players need to be able to do that sometimes, to know why that note is there, how you're leading to the next chord.

Are you into any electric bass players?

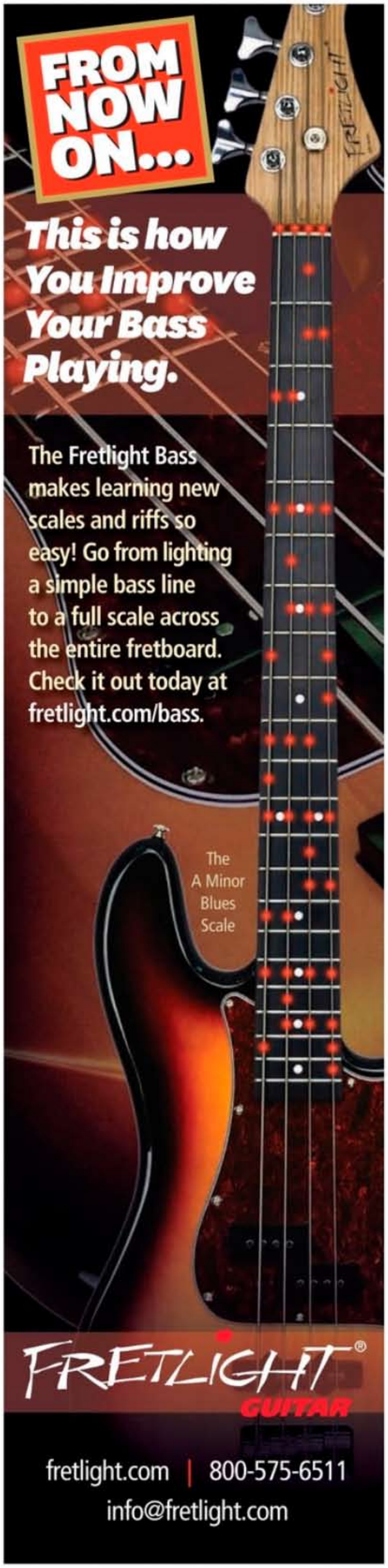
Sure—I started out as a kid on cello, and then transitioned to the electric bass, and then to upright. I was such a rock guy growing up. I love Paul McCartney's playing, the Stones, Nick Lowe ... I still play some electric on occasion.

What kind of electric bass do you prefer?

I like strange ones! I've got a '60s Decca that I really like—it's got some funky old pickups. I've got a nice Fender Precision, too, but one bass I've played a lot over the years is a hot-rod Asian bass that looks like a [Danelectro] Longhorn. It was given to me by my friend Skunk Baxter, who put some good pickups in it, a brass bridge, and brass nut. I played it in Phantom, Rocker & Slick.

How has the technology changed for slap bass?

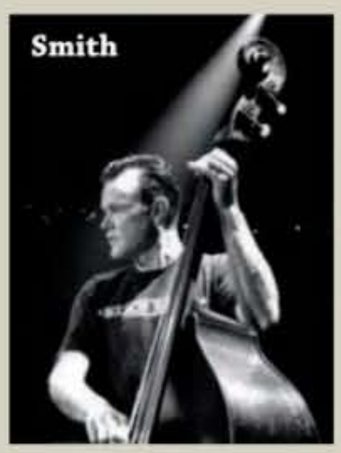
When I first started, there were fewer choices for electronics. It was kind of a DIY thing from early on. We would take a pickup, like a split-coil Precision, mount it on a block of wood, and attach that to the end of the fingerboard. I'd run that like an electric bass, and then have a transducer from an acoustic guitar and move that around the instrument until I found a nice percussive sound. On the Ampeg SVT there were two channels, so I'd have one EQ'd for the slap and one for the note, and I'd blend them. I always wanted engineers to mic my cabinet, because I'm creating my sound, and they're behind the board.



Chops Props

Giordano

"Lee Rocker was and is the first guy who exposed my generation to a world of upright bass that made you want to tear your hands apart practicing for hours on end. He made it so cool to be an upright bass player." **—Elio Giordano (The Mavericks)**


Smith

"Lee is hugely influential; I still listen to early Stray Cats stuff. You don't hear a lot of upright bass, much less slap players, in pop music. He's made some great records." **—Kevin Smith (Willie Nelson, Dwight Yoakham, High Noon)**

Firebough

"If you see a guy slapping a doghouse bass in a rockabilly or psychobilly band, chances are Lee Rocker was a big reason for it. And now, there's a new generation of slap bassists getting that influence second-hand from the guys they learned from. Much respect!" **—Geoff Firebough (Hillbilly Casino, BR549)**

Stijepovic

"Lee Rocker could be the most influential upright slap bass player since the 1950s. Lee and the Stray Cats were the much-needed link between the roots and contemporary music. Without them, many of us wouldn't play the way we do. Thank you, Lee!" **—Djordje Stijepovic (artofslapbass.com)**

Roe

"Lee Rocker and the Stray Cats not only gave us a cool, updated version of a classic sound—with the help of modernized gear and Lee's propulsive technique, they also put the slap bass up front in the mix. On a lot of old records, the bass was lost. In fact, a lot of folks thought that the click coming from the bass was actually a drum sound. I've fought this battle through the years with many drummers, who insisted on doubling me with rimshot clicks. Lee made it clear what was going on. And hey, it's a simple fact: The Stray Cats are the only modern rockabilly band that's been really successful, and he is a big part of the reason for that. When I first heard him live, using an SVT, it changed my life on how to get a good live sound. Not only is he a great player, but he was really nice to me the couple of times I've met him. And a snappy dresser!" **—David Roe (Johnny Cash, Nashville session ace)**

You had some early guidance in this department, right?

[Ampeg B-15 designer] Jess Oliver lived in my town, and he helped me make my first pickups. It's funny, because I'm still very tight with Ampeg—but back then, I didn't know; he was just a guy down the street helping me out.

What kind of pickups do you use now?

For my more "rock" basses with steel strings, I use EMG active pickups sunk into the fingerboard. You can raise or lower them by pushing on them. I blend that with a Planet Wing transducer. For the more 'billy basses with gut, I use just the transducer. In my live shows, I use both basses. There's a point in the set when we bring it back to the day in terms of sound: acoustic guitar, drums with brushes, or no drums, and I play the gut strings.

What kind of rig are you pushing?

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THUNDERCAT

Check out Thundercat's latest release *Apocalypse*.

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All different kinds of Ampeg, depending on the situation. For a large outdoor show, I'll use an SVT. I used a solid-state PRO-series head with a 6x10. And in the studio, it'll be a B-15, or that little Micro-VR rig. I tend to prefer 10" speakers; they respond a little quicker. If there's a tweeter in the cab, I turn it off.

What kind of steel strings are you using?

Jargar medium tension. They're not as bright and plinky as some of the others I've tried; they have a little more warmth. If you pluck the string and look at a strobe tuner, you can see they stay true to pitch for a long time, and they're responsive enough that you can use a little left-hand vibrato.

Do you like high or low string action?

On both steel- and gut-string setups, I like it high enough to get my middle and ring fingers under the string—but not completely. I adjust pretty well, though. My basses have a very traditional setup, like a jazz player would have, but I'm not one of these players who has to have a certain neck or feel.

How was your recent experience at BPL?

Receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award was a huge thrill. I love what I do, and it's such a great feeling to get this kind of recognition from other bass players. Having Mike Dirnt and Billy Sheheen present the award was the topper. The really interesting part was the diversity of players who were there—from Don Was to Geezer Butler—all performing on the same stage. Unbelievable! And, having Miles Mosley, John Williams, Brain Bromberg, and Carlitos Del Puerto up onstage jamming with me was outrageous. It proves just how versatile the upright bass can be.

What's coming in the future?

I'm working on another record, entirely of new songs I've written. Writing for me tends to ebb and flow; it's not a given, and lately it's been flowing. It's great to be in that mindset and writing songs and running into the studio.

You have a show coming up with a 70-piece orchestra. What's that about?

I was asked to play at the Laguna Beach Arts Center Playhouse. We'll do some Stray Cats, some new stuff of mine, and some classics. We're just starting to talk with arrangers, rehearsals starting soon—the concerts are in February. It's good to take chances; you never know what's going to come of it, and it opens your ears to something different. We're definitely filming and recording this, and it'll be available in some form.

Traveling as much as you do with an upright bass must be a challenge.

I've tried it every which way. These days typically I'll ship an upright bass in a flight case in advance. That's why I have a lot of instruments; I've always got one out somewhere. But in my contract I always have them provide one as a backup, in case they drive a forklift through my bass at the airport—which has happened! I have a travel bass now from Kolstein, like my Tuxedo bass, called a Bussetto. It's a great bass. It's a carved instrument, has a full-size neck, but it's a little thinner—it's like playing a hot-rod bass. It was designed so the airlines have to take it as oversize baggage.

Any more tours planned?

Sure, but I don't tour in the traditional sense anymore; we fly in to a lot of dates now. I like to do 50 or 60 shows a year. We flew out to Moscow for one show, flew to France for a day. It's exciting and it keeps it fresh. I'm really happy with how I've got things organized at this point in my career. **BP**

See music lesson, page 36

INFO

LISTEN

Lee Rocker, *Night Train to Memphis* [Upright, 2012]

EQUIP

Basses Kolstein Lee Rocker Bussetto Travel Bass, Kolstein Lee Rocker ¾ Model Tuxedo

Strings Efrano guts, Jargar Medium steel

Pickup Planet Wing, EMG magnetic pickups in fingerboard

Rig Ampeg SVT, B-15, Micro VR

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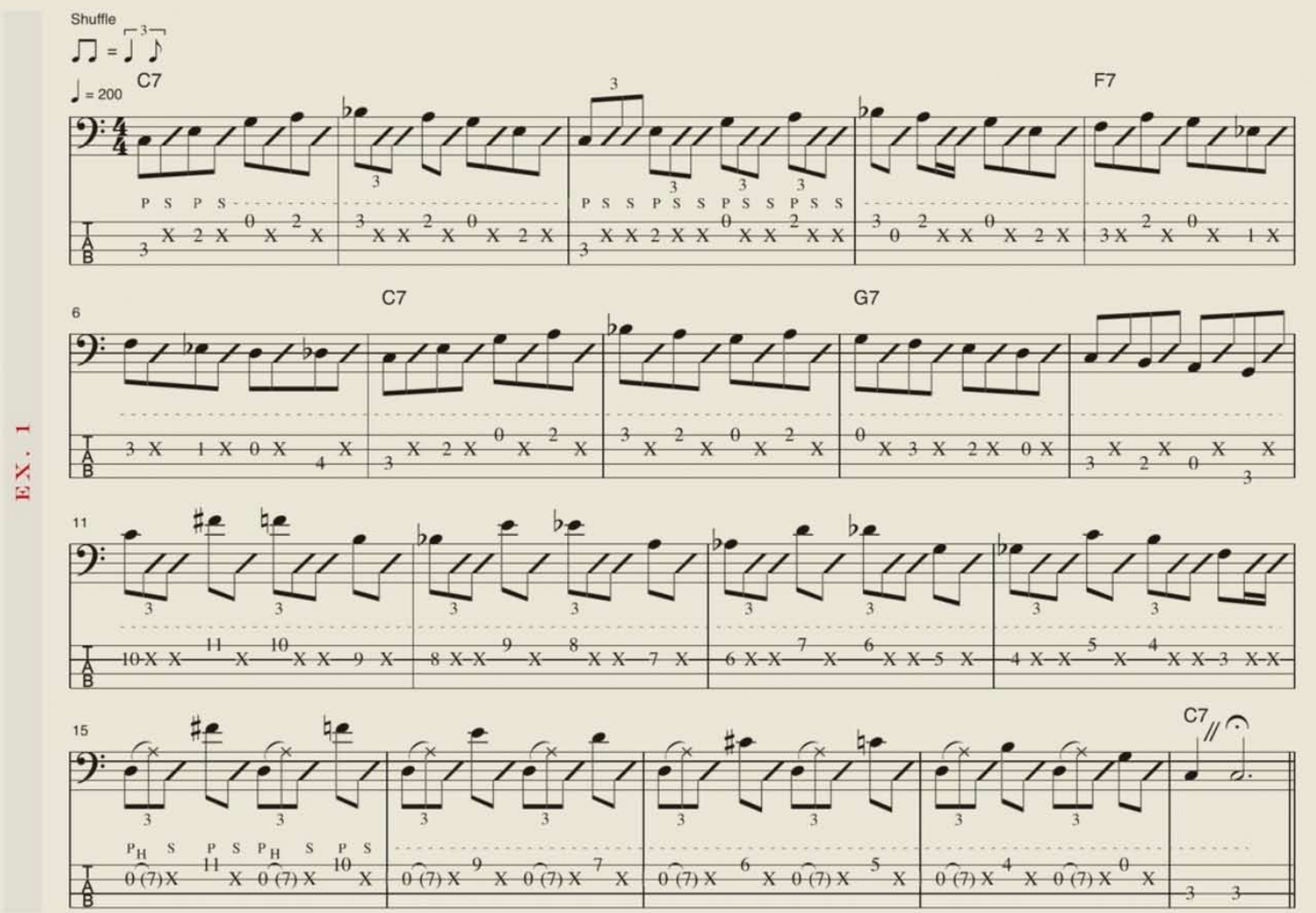
SLAP THE BASS!

LEE ROCKER'S SOLE original on *Night Train to Memphis* is appropriately titled "Slap the Bass." It's a classic swinging rockabilly affair, based on a 12-bar blues in *C*, but with enough tricky spots that you'd have to be at rehearsal. The slick opening statement grabs you immediately—a super-cool chromatically descending tritone, played with an alternating triplet/eighth slap pattern. Lee slaps like a madman, and grabs a few hot breaks, including a quick blast of fingerstyle—but he's saving the big guns for the end.

Example 1 is the 12-bar shout chorus at the very end of the song, including the ending lick. The line has a shuffle/swing feel, but for visual simplicity, we've written it as straight eighth-notes. The opening two bars are textbook Lee Rocker: a classic boogie line (1–3–5–6–♭7–6–5–3) plucked with a single right-hand slap (see **Ex. A**) between each note. He uses a triplet slap (**Ex. B**) at the crest of the line (*B*♭) in bar 2, but then unleashes a torrent in bar 3, climbing up the *C* arpeggio with full bore, and on two wheels. On the way down in bar 4, he sneaks in a "drag triplet" (**Ex. C**), continuing on through the next four bars with classic single-slap lines. In bars 9 and 10, he walks all the way down the *G* Mixolydian scale and brings back the intro lick for a big finish. Starting in bar 11, play a triple-slap *C* (10th fret of your *D* string—if you had frets) with your left-hand 1st finger and the single-slap *F*♯ on the *G* string with your 2nd finger. Slide the 2nd finger down one half-step to a triple-slap *F*♮, and play the single-slap *B* with the 1st finger. This is the descending chromatic pattern for the first four bars of the ending. A quick drag triplet at the end of the phrase sets up the next sequence, which follows the same alternating triplet/eighth rhythm pattern as the previous four bars, but adds a left-hand hammer-on to the triplet (**Ex. D**), bouncing from the open *D* string to an *A* with the 1st finger. Reach up to the *F*♯ in bar 15 with your 4th finger, and continue using it all the way through the descending line. This all happens at 200 BPM, so you'd better eat your Wheaties!

EX. 1

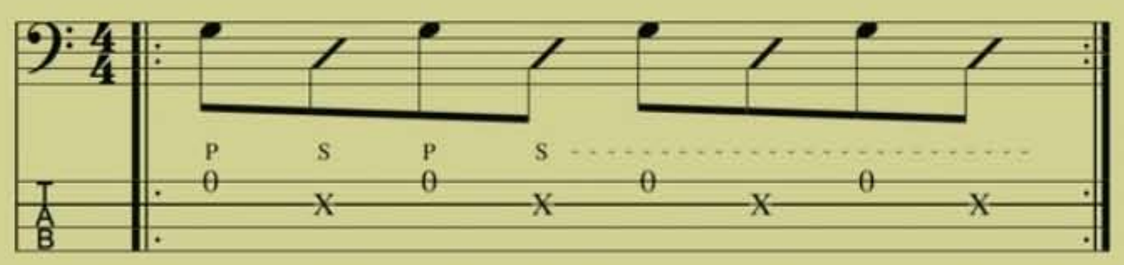


SLAP TUTORIAL

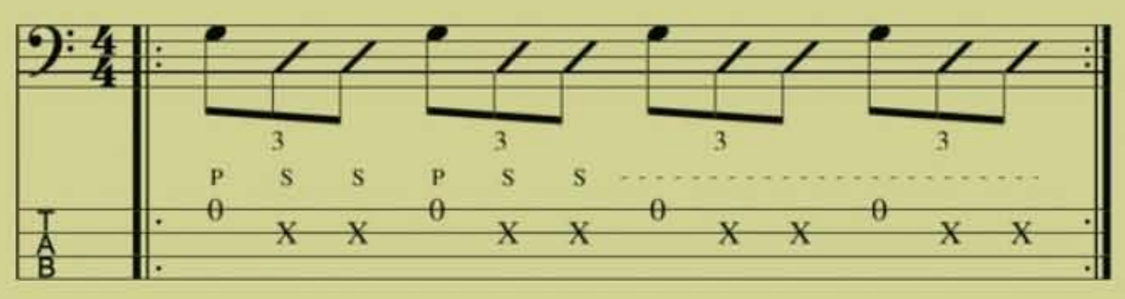
If you've never slapped an upright bass before, this will give you a clue about what Lee Rocker is doing. But keep in mind, the technique takes time to master, and your hands need to toughen up. Be patient—if you use steel strings, you can blister up in the first five minutes. Exercise caution.

The best piece of advice I have was told to me by Austin slap-master Mark Rubin of Bad Livers. He said, "It's not about the slap; it's about the pluck." Your downbeats are being plucked, and we all know how important the downbeat is—focus first on the pluck. Focusing on the slap can make your arm tense up; we are not "hitting" the bass. The slap happens organically as the hand returns to pluck another downbeat, and the rhythm you play is controlled by speed of your hand. Play **Ex. A** slowly, focusing on the pluck. Use two or even three fingers to pluck, and let the flat of your hand naturally fall onto the fingerboard for the single slap. The triplet slap shown in **Ex. B** can be played a couple of ways. Pluck the first note, and either double-slap with the hand in an up-down motion, or work a circular movement that plays the first slap with the butt of the hand and the second slap with the palm. This is a similar movement to **Ex. C**, which is called a drag triplet (although it is actually an eighth-note followed by two 16th-note slaps). The drag triplet is typically phrased with the slaps as a rhythmic pickup to the next pluck, creating a flam-like feel: "and-a-*one*, and-a-*two*." Slap the string with the butt of the hand, then the palm, then pluck. Just remember: The pluck is the downbeat, not the slap. **Example D** is another triplet variation, incorporating ghosted hammer-ons.

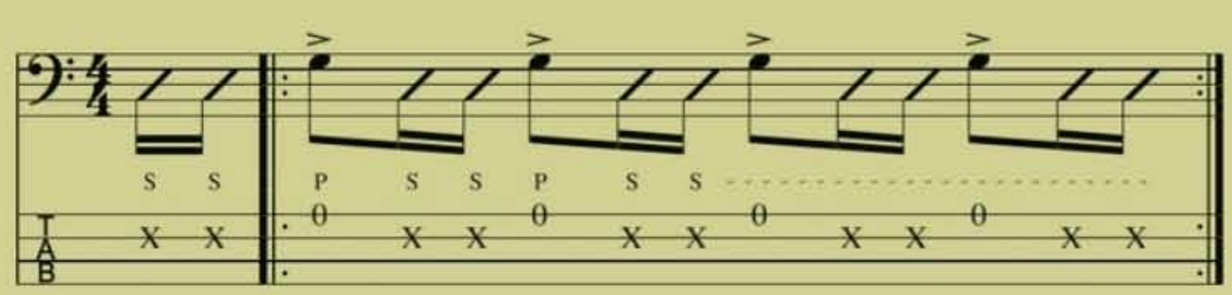
EX. A



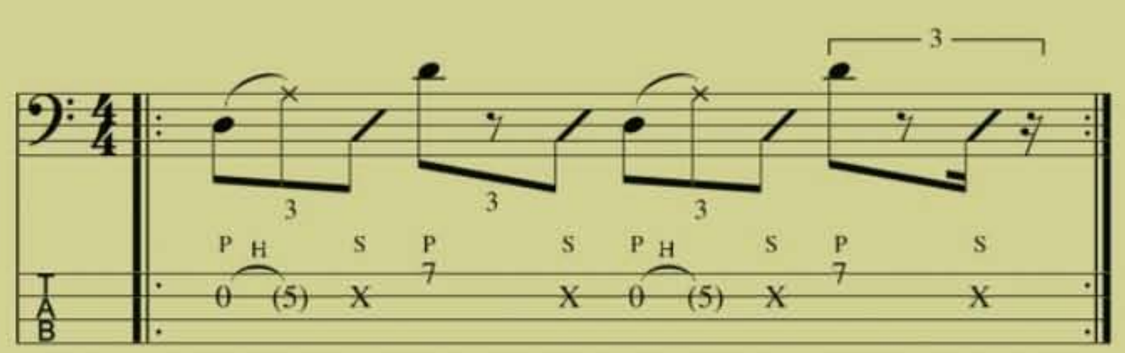
EX. B



EX. C



EX. D



METAL MASTERS, BLUES GURUS, AND FUSION PHENOMS UNITE AT THE YEAR'S BIGGEST AND BEST BASS BASH.

BY CHRIS JISI | PHOTOS BY ALEX KLUFT AND BRYAN BEASLEY

ARRIVING THREE WEEKS LATER THAN USUAL, AND WITH A jaunty new concert venue in the form of a Hollywood Golden Age theater, Bass Player LIVE! returned to Los Angeles on November 9–10th in grand style. SoCal sunshine and a sold-out spate of exhibitors greeted attendees on Saturday morning at SIR Studios on Sunset Blvd. This included such first-time participants as bass makers Sadowsky, Marleaux, Brubaker, and Moore, amp manufacturers EBS, Eden, Traynor, and TecAmp, and accessory specialists Gruv Gear, Zymöl, and Ecom Seating—along with returning mainstays like Hartke, Warwick, Ampeg, Aguilar, Ibanez, Dunlop, D'Addario, La Bella, Fodera, MTD, Gallien-Krueger, Carvin, Tech 21, and many more. The always-diverse clinic side launched with upright bass-and-effects futurist Miles Mosley opposite a metal bass panel boasting Billy Sheehan, David Ellefson, Frank

The hang backstage at the Fonda Theatre (from left): Phil Chen, David Ellefson, Corey Taylor, Rudy Sarzo, Frank Bello, and Chris Broderick.

Upright dudes Miles Mosley, Carlos Del Puerto, Jr., John B. Williams, and Brian Bromberg join Lee Rocker and band for a low-end throwdown.

Bello, and Rex Brown. Other Saturday clinics included Sheehan, Janek Gwizdala, and the debuts of Lee Rocker (with guitarist Buzz Campbell), Michael Manring, and Rhonda Smith. More artist seminars buzzed in the Warwick and Yamaha rooms. In a closing clinic that more than lived up to its name, The Changing Face of L.A. Session Bass indeed changed face when both Sean Hurley and Alex Al got last-minute sessions that prevented them from joining Bob Glaub and Chris Chaney on the panel. Veteran studio ace Neil Stubenhaus was an insightful, on-the-spot replacement.

With 6PM arriving swiftly, attendees had both a new location and a new wrinkle for which to travel a few blocks northeast. The evening's concert at the Henry Fonda Theater on Hollywood Blvd. began with a Red Carpet. The spacious lobby and bar area also sported poster-size blow-ups of past BP covers featuring artists at this year's event. At the downbeat of 7:30, with the large audience split between the floor and the balcony, host comedian Jim Norton began the show by introducing Green Day bassist Mike Dirnt and Billy Sheehan to present the evening's first honor: a Lifetime Achievement Award to rockabilly legend Lee Rocker. The grateful Stray Cat slapper—on lead vocals and bass, and backed by guitarists Buzz Campbell and Brophy Dale, and drummer James Sagebiel—then slid into a slick, six-song set, highlighted by the closing blues tune, "Rockabilly Boogie," in which he was joined by fellow double bass titans Brian Bromberg, John B. Williams, Carlos Del Puerto, Jr., and Miles Mosley—with each taking a two-chorus solo. Norton reemerged to bring out über-producer/bassist Don Was and bassmaker Roger Sadowsky to present the Young Gun Award to Tal Wilkenfeld. The "Wonder from Down Under" thanked a long list of people who have helped with her remarkable journey, and then she counted off her quintet (Benmont Tench on organ, Steve Ferrone on drums, Paul Stacey on guitar, and Gabe Witcher on violin and vocals) for a rousing five-song set of covers and originals, culminating in a solo vocal and chordal bass version of Leonard Cohen's "Chelsea Hotel."

Approaching the evening's halfway point, Norton summoned Darryl Jones to the mic to present the Legacy Award to the family of the late blues giant, Willie Dixon, accepted graciously by grandson Alex Dixon. Next, Darryl's killer unit—Bernard Fowler on vocals, Ferrone on drums, Jorge Evans on guitar, Deron Johnson on keyboards, Scott Thurston on harmonica, Darryl, on a 4-string

Tal Wilkenfeld accepts her Young Gun Award presented by Sadowsky Guitars.

he built himself, and guest bassists Jerry Jemmott and Don Was (on upright)—had their way with three Dixon classics: "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man," "Wang Dang Doodle," and "The Little Red Rooster."

The Black Sabbath-themed all-star headline set now remained, commencing with Norton's introduction of the house band: drummer Charlie Benante, guitarist Chris Broderick, and for the opening song, "Supernaut," Billy Sheehan on bass and dUg Pinnick on vocals. David Ellefson joined the fray to play "A National Acrobat," then dUg handed the mic to Slipnot/Stone Sour singer Corey Taylor for "Children of the Grave" and "Hand of Doom," which featured BLS bass man J.D. DeServio. Pinnick returned to the stage with Rex Brown to rip "Hole in the Sky," and Dio veteran Rudy Sarzo joined Sebastian Bach to rock "Heaven & Hell." With Frank Bello on bass and the inimitable Zakk Wylde on harmonica (!), the band conjured dark magic with "The Wizard" before handing bass duties to Jason Newsted for another Sabbath classic, "War Pigs." With the stinging overtones of "War Pigs" lingering in the air, Frank Bello and Hartke's Mark Menghi took the side stage to present a Lifetime Achievement Award to the night's esteemed guest, Black Sabbath rock bass icon Geezer Butler. The soft-spoken Butler thanked all before joining the house band for inspired versions of "Fairies Wear Boots" and "N.I.B.," which brought the memorable evening to the kind of feel-good conclusion so familiar to BP LIVE! audiences.

After accepting his Lifetime Achievement Award presented by Hartke, Geezer Butler ripped into renditions of "Fairies Wear Boots" and "N.I.B.".

Darryl Jones (right) presents Alex Dixon with a Legacy Award honoring his grandfather, Willie Dixon.

Groggy from a great night of music, but eager for the day's lineup of prime gear and clinic content, attendees returned to fill the first-slot seminars of Nathan East (with sponataneous guest Janek Gwizdala) and Adam Nitti, and ensuing sit-downs with Jerry Jemmott and Evan Brewer. Panel power returned, as Rickey Minor surrounded himself with East and Ready Freddie Washington, opposite Ellefson and Bello's metallic team-up, and Nate Watts invited guest bassists Sekou Bunch and Brandon Brown to join his hour in the spotlight. Meanwhile, across SIR, smoke and steam seemed to rise from Carlos Del Puerto, Jr.'s upright fingerboard, as he demonstrated his coal-hot, Cuban-infused groove improvisation concepts with guitarist Ramon Stagnaro and drummer Jimmy Branly in a closing clinic that drew a rapt crowd of his peers, including Bromberg, Stubenhaus, Phil Chen, Jimmy Earl, Brandino, Jerry Watts, and Rufus Philpot. From Geezer Butler's long-awaited lauding at the Fonda to Sunday's fiery finish by Carlitos, BPL! 2013 was once again rife with Hollywood endings.

The View From Berklee

Berklee College of Music Professor Danny Morris took extensive notes at this year's Bass Player LIVE!, and was kind enough to share. You can find his wrap-up of the weekend at **bassplayer.com/berkleebpl13**.

Headbanging 101: Using lessons learned at Bass Player LIVE!, Berklee prof Danny Morris analyzes Frank Bello's playing on "Caught in a Mosh" by Anthrax.

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Janek Gwizdala (left) and Miles Mosley rocked an impromptu duet in S.I.R.'s Studio 3, which was packed with killer gear from Aguilar, Blast Cult, Dunlop, Spector, and Zon.

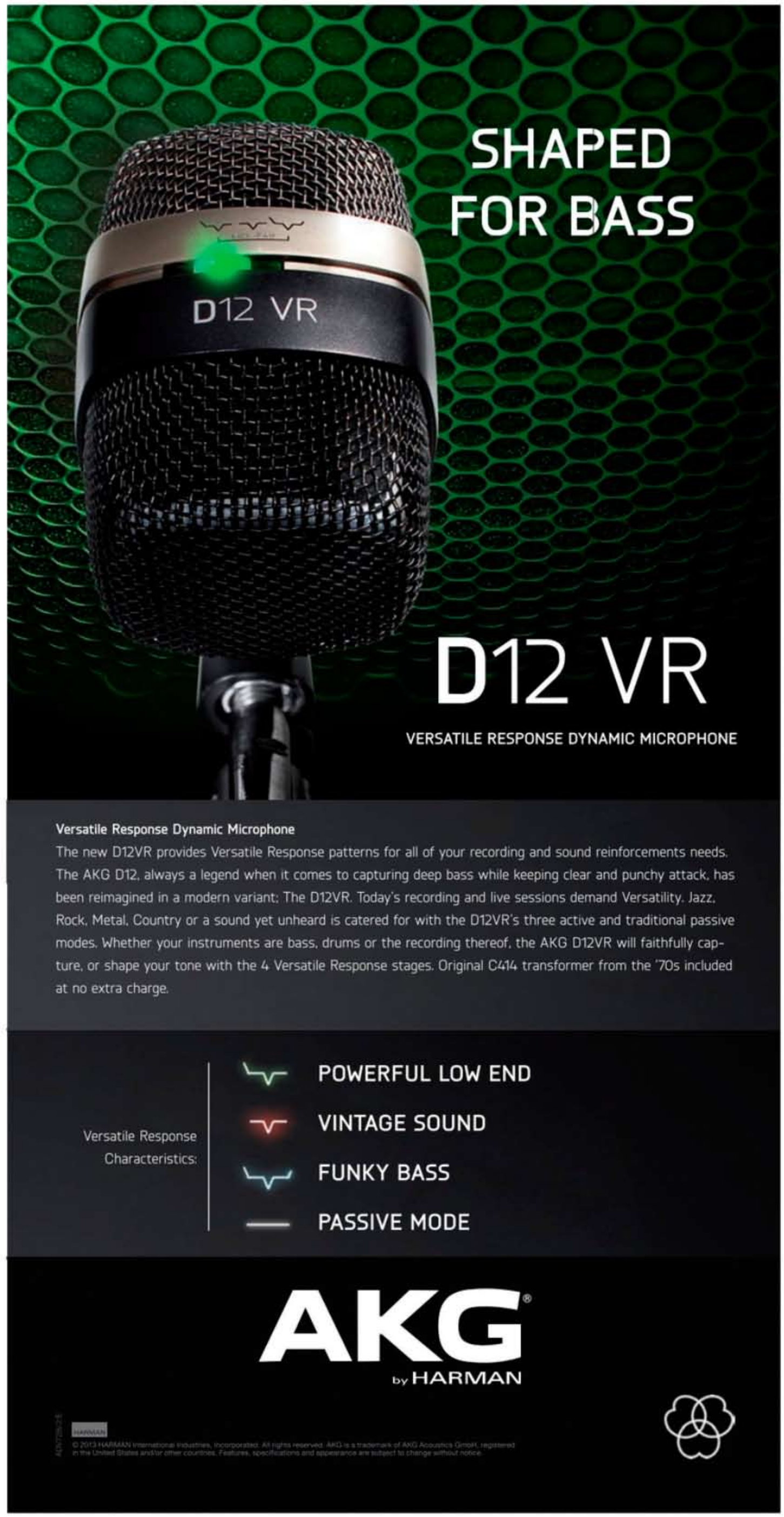
Ampeg brought a new V-4B head signed by Lee Rocker to give away through its Facebook page.

D'Addario rep'd its line of bass strings, including the new Balanced Tension sets.

Brubaker brought a bevvy of Brute basses, including a custom prototype built for blues and R&B legend Jerry Jemmott.

Jeff Kiesel of Carvin and Bjorn Englan of Dio Disciples show off Carvin's new PB5 bass.

Bass Strings Online had an arsenal of J-Basses strung with different string sets for an awesomely easy A/B experience.



DAVID ELLEFSON
MEGADETH

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Signature Series strings from Dean Markley (bottom left) were among the many product launches at BPL!

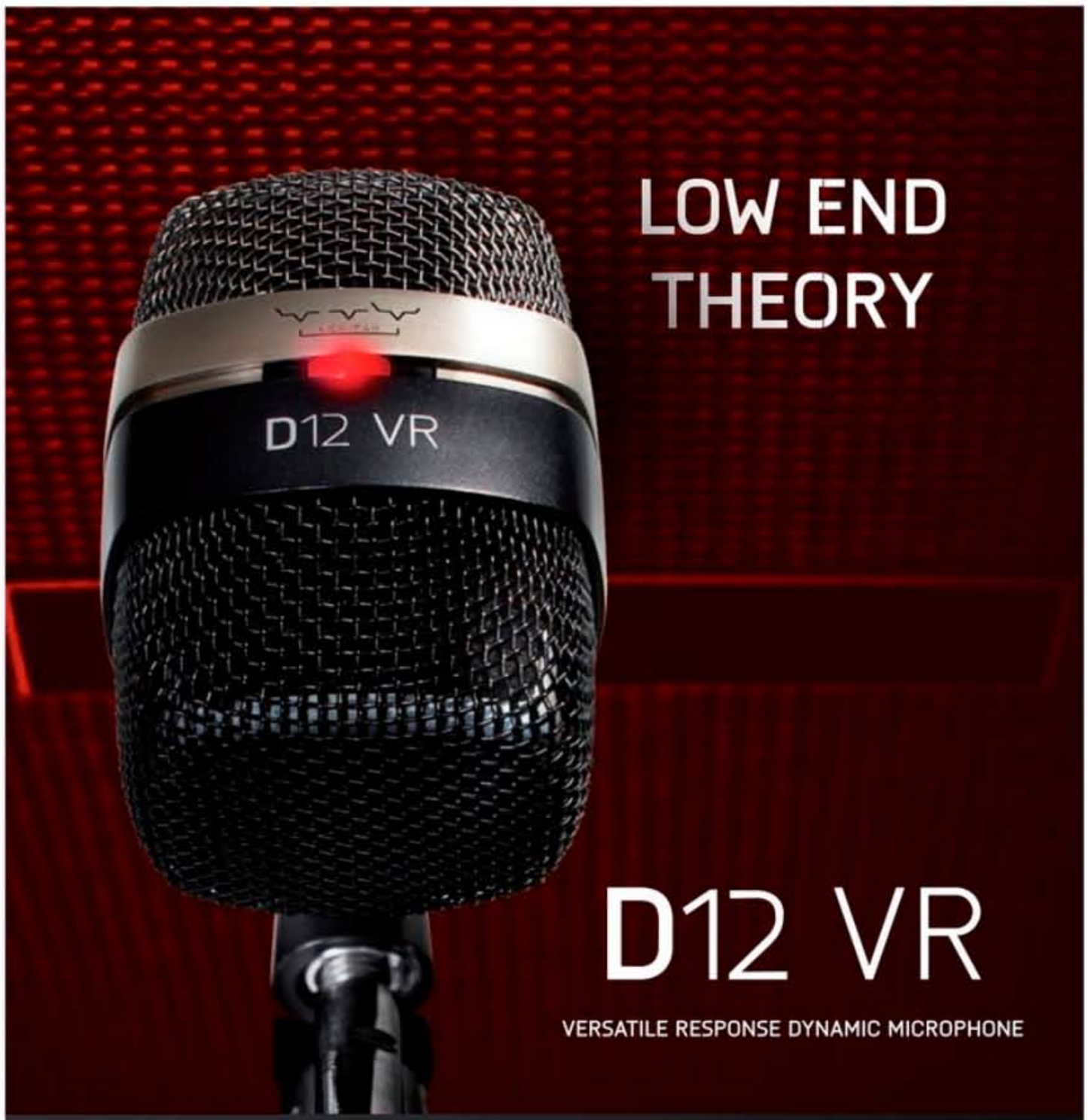
Igor Saavedra's custom throne from Ecom Seating has a stand for his Markbass rig, a beverage holder, and more.

Elixir Strings continues to proudly tout its recently redesigned Nanoweb sets.

The array of Eden rigs included new EC Series combos.

A colorful Billy Sheehan Signature Drive and the new EBS FuzzMo pedal sit atop a Classic 500 rig.

Epiphone and Gibson were out in force, and gave away this sweet Thunderbird bass to a lucky attendee.



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A stack of Gallien-Krueger MBP powered speaker cabinets stands ready to rock.

Groovy gear from GHS Strings included its new Big Core Bass strings.

From ergonomic straps to fret wraps, Gruv Gear shows its dedication to the low end set.

With two clinics and a performance in the concert tribute to Geezer Butler, David Ellefson was a busy man. Here, he signs copies of his new book, *My Life with Deth*, at the Hartke booth.

THE CHOICE OF TOP SELLING COUNTRY BANDS

Lee Hendricks — ERIC CHURCH
Nickel Plated Blue Steel Strings

Dennis Edwards — LADY ANTEBELLUM
Nickel Plated Blue Steel Strings

PAUL BUSHNELL — TIM McGRAW
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Paul Chapman — Colt Ford
Nickel Plated Blue Steel Strings

Tully Kennedy — JASON ALDEAN
Nickel Plated Blue Steel Strings

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More than a dozen Ibanez basses topped tables of temptation on the exhibit foor.

Lots of lucky attendees got their hands on the new RX series strings from La Bella.

In an alcove that featured domestic beauties by Fodera, Sadowsky, NS Design, and Sukop, Marleaux basses brought an element of Euro elegance.

We hope to be seeing more from Southern California's Moore Basses, who was new to the exhibit floor this year.

Robert "Bubby" Lewis lays it down with his custom MTD bass through a TecAmp rig.

NS Design Radius basses (left) on display with some of NS's more upright offerings.

Roger Sadowsky (left) shares a moment with Nik West and Rickey Minor.

Next to some hip hardware from Two Notes Audio Engineering, Sandberg shows some love for the lefties.

Judging from Rhonda Smith's Saturday clinic, Paul Reed Smith Gary Granger Basses sound as sexy as they look.

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(Angra)
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active
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mid-cut
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treble
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piccolo bass
piccolo bass
the future has been drawn

The new SPV-4 Steve Harris Signature was one of several sweet pickups on display from Seymour Duncan.

A Ken Smith 6-string seduces passers-by.

It's no surprise somebody snatched up an Aguilar-equipped Spector Coda Bass 5-string.

Sukop's double- and single-cut basses sounded sweet through the booth's Schroeder cabinets.

Check it out! Uriah Duffy shows off the new BG combos from TC Electronic.

We were excited to get our hands on the VT Bass DI from Tech 21 (bottom left). Review coming soon!

Size ain't everything; the Small Block combos from Traynor are itty-bitty brawlers.

The hang in the Warwick room was heavy! From left: Hans-Peter Wilfer, Divinity Roxx, Robert Trujillo, Kevin "Brandino" Brandon, Alphonso Johnson, Andy Calder, Andy Irvine, Nick Schendzielos, Evan Brewer, and Scott Reeder.

Zymöl was on hand to show its top-notch polishes.

The Yamaha room played host to Billy Sheehan, Nathan East, and more for a live webcast. Keep your eyes peeled for a review of the new TRBX basses (foreground).

Mike Merritt checks out the new Bakithi Kumalo Signature U-BASS.

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Marathon MAN

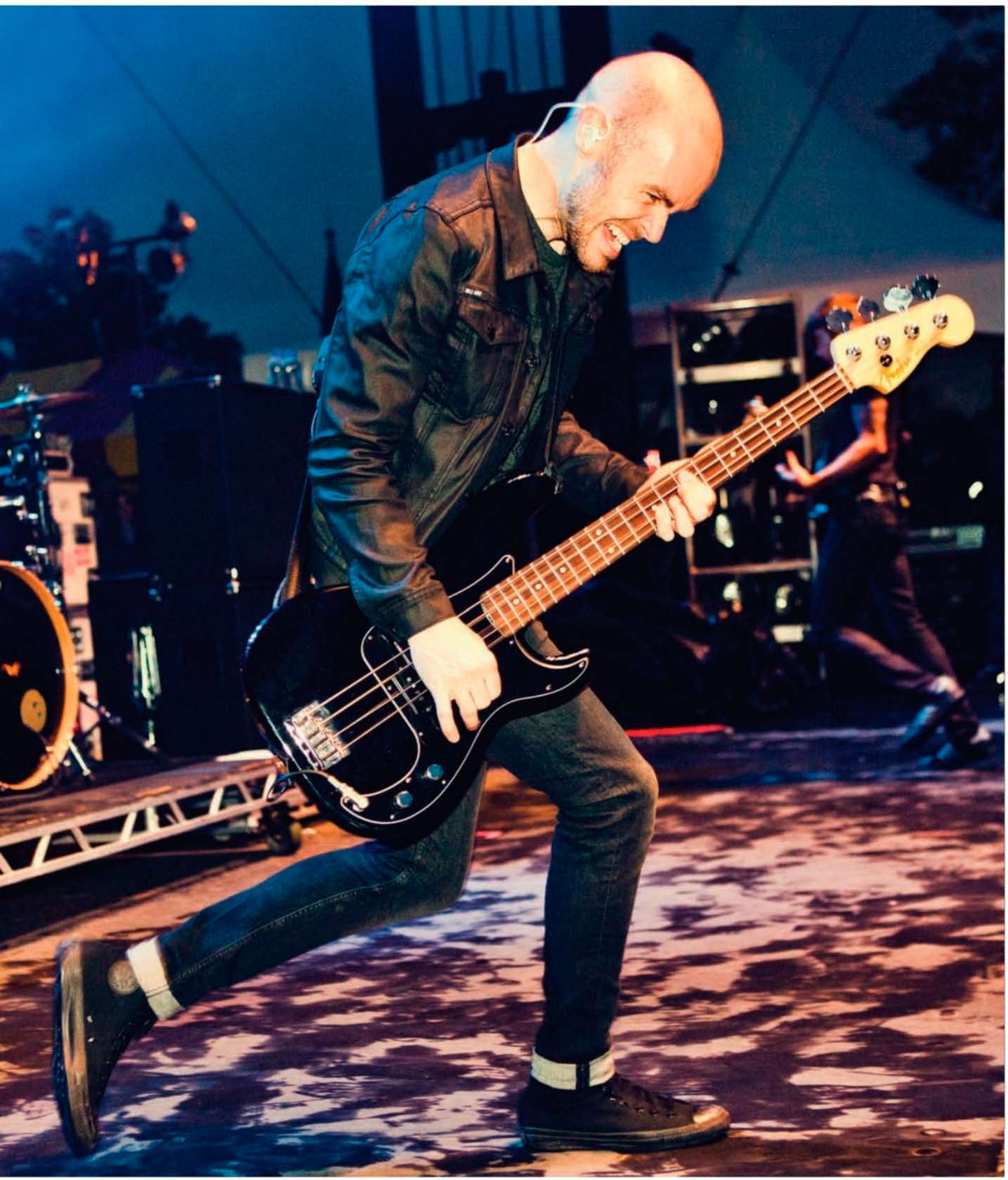
HUNTER BURGAN GOES THE DISTANCE WITH AFI

BY JON D'AURIA

PHOTOGRAPH BY JONATHAN WEINER

AS AN AVID LONG-DISTANCE RUNNER, Hunter Burgan knows a thing or two about the importance of endurance. And given his 16-year run with gothic-punk outfit AFI, it's clear that Hunter understands how keeping pace and evolving your stride yields results. Growing up as a multi-instrumentalist who eventually found a calling in bass, Burgan's early days as a hardcore player were fueled by a "speed-first" mentality where note density took precedence over melodic choices. Now a seasoned pro, Hunter focuses on the song as a whole and his relationship to the other instruments around him. On his band's ninth release, *Burials*, Burgan has lost none of the fire of youth, but this time around there's much more than speed fueling the movement of his bass lines. And thanks to doubling up lines with synth bass and using a three-amp setup in the studio, Burgan's tone is louder and lower than ever.

In his downtime prior to tracking *Burials*, Burgan kept busy with *The Color of Summer*, a solo album he recorded under the name Las Gatas Beach Club. The tracks showcase Hunter's multi-instrumental acumen and love for melodic, laid-back beach music. Sporting a warm, clean bass tone with a resemblance to dub and putting the spotlight on vocals and ukulele, Las Gatas Beach Club couldn't be further from AFI's sound. But don't let the chill vibe of his solo work deceive you—Burgan and his AFI bandmates



are thrashing as hard as ever. Even after years of constant touring, Hunter still relishes the excitement of the stage, and judging from his high-flying leaps and roundhouse jump kicks, he's as fit as when he was just a young punk picking up the bass. With a lot of road behind him, much awaiting him, and the knowledge that pace is everything, Hunter is now hitting full stride.

How do you view your role in AFI?

I like to think that even from the earliest years when we were playing hardcore music, instead of just following the guitar riffs, I would try to squeeze other genres of music into what we were doing. That's kind of my mission statement in this band. Whether that is by trying to put a jazz movement into a fast hardcore song or putting some punk into a pop song, that's just me trying to be the rebel. At the same time, I understand the fundamental role of a bass player, and I try to give each song movement and counterpoint where it needs it. I also try to play off the vocals more than the other instruments, because I feel like the bass is a highly melodic instrument.

What were your goals for bass on *Burials*?

When you're presented with a song that already has a set mood, you have to find the most tasteful thing to play—what will serve the song best, and what won't take away from what's already there. I love that challenge. It's often what I do best—solving that puzzle.

Can you give an example?

On "The Face Beneath the Waves," there is a middle section that I tried a hundred different things on. I didn't love any of them, and then I realized that the best thing I could do was not play. Most bass players reach that thought process or level of maturity at some point in their career, but it was a real eye-opener for me.

You get some gritty tones on the new album. How did you dial in your sound?

For most of the songs I used three different amps that we blended together; I didn't use a direct signal at all this time around. I used an Ampeg SVT Classic with an 8x10 cab for warmth and body, a 100-watt Fender Bassman and 4x10 cabinet for my midrange, and a Marshall JCM800 and 4x12 for my top-end gain. We mixed those three amps differently for each song to get different tones. It was all about getting crazy, aggressive sounds that were in some cases deeper than anything I'd gotten in the past.

You also play synth bass.

On "The Embrace," I used two additional synth basses on top of the three amps, and it made the song so thick on bass. I used a Moog Minotaur that sounded great blended in. When you're double-tracking bass and synths, you risk frequency cancellation, but if you experiment with it, you can make it work.

How would you describe your picking technique?

Live shows are such a circus that my technique varies a bit between the stage and the studio. Depending on the nature of the song or how much I'm moving around, I often do a thing where I'll fret with one left-hand finger and use the other three fingers to mute the other strings. That way I can go crazy with my right hand. It's a bit sloppy; I only do that if I'm jumping off the kick drum or something. Because I do a lot of crazy moves onstage, I use my right-hand ring and pinkie fingers to lock my hand in and keep my bass in place. It keeps it steady and allows

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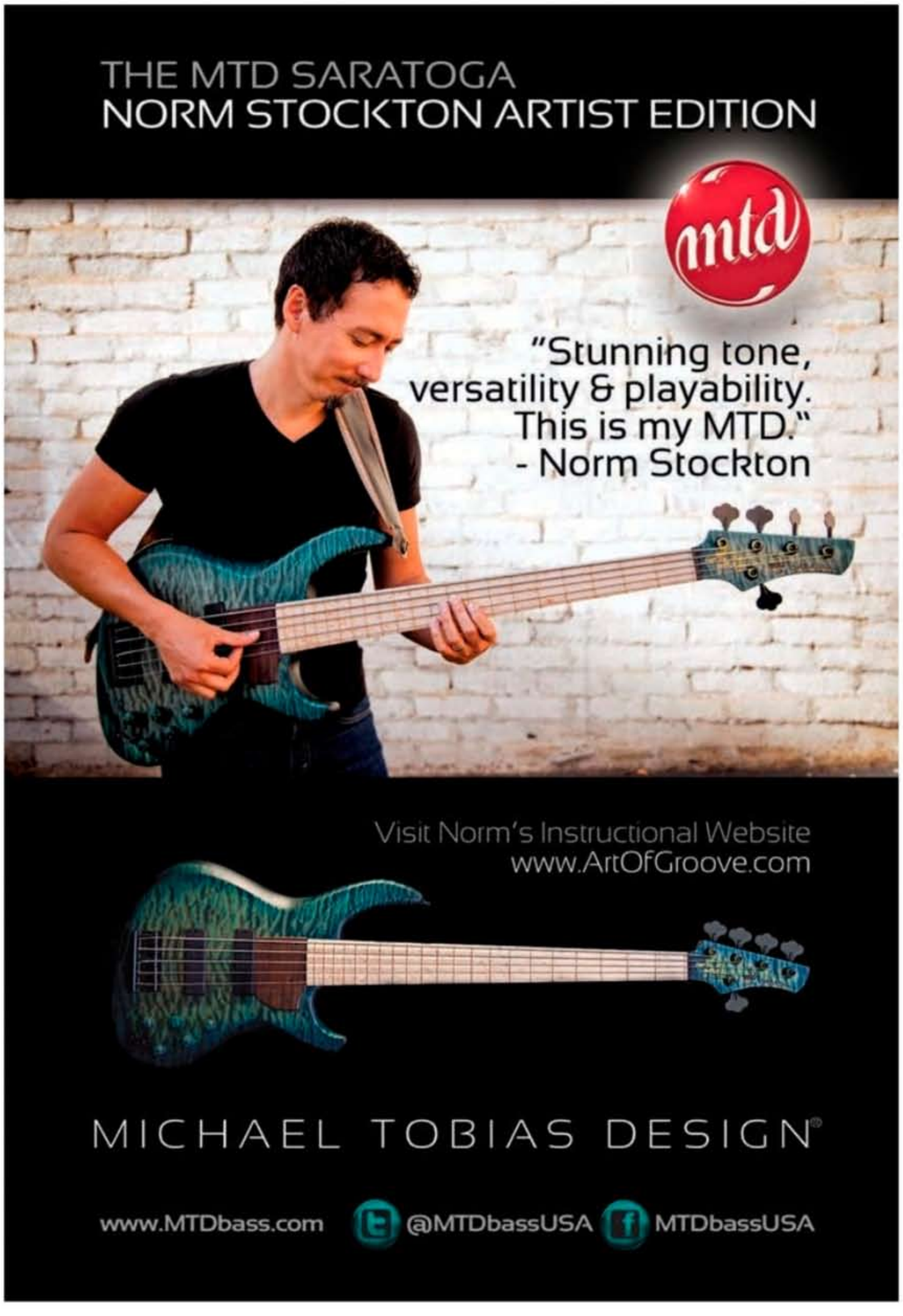
me to do my ninja kicks. I feel like I have a pretty large toolbox of techniques because I've worked on them for so long.

In your opinion, what makes for a great bass tone?

I always feel safe plugging into an Ampeg SVT Classic with an 8x10 cab. You can dial the knobs straight up and you'll get a great tone. I like to turn down the treble and roll up the bass a little; it all depends on the room and how it reacts to low end. I shape a lot of my tone with my picking hand—just the angle of the pick and how hard I'm playing dictates a lot. I usually play really hard, but I can dial it back to change my dynamics. I feel like I can get almost any sound that I want just from altering my picking attack.



Your solo work is quite different from your AFI style.

I'm into a lot of different genres of music that are way out of the realm of AFI, and it's a great thing to have outlets to convey the other sides of my playing. Getting to work with other artists is really exciting; it's a great opportunity to work on new songs and new puzzles in studio situations that call for a lot of improvisation. There's not a lot of that in AFI, because we like to know everything we're doing before we go into the studio. So it was refreshing to come up with an idea on the fly and not know if it works or not.

What excites you most about playing live?

We have an audience in front of us who came to see a show. If they've seen us live before, they know what to expect—we can't let them down. If they've never seen us before, this is our first opportunity to blow them away. That's the first thing I think about when I get out onstage. I get excited before we even play a note. From there, it's mostly a matter of pacing energy.

How do you manage that?

I think about how I'm going to carry my energy through a long performance. You want to come out strong, of course, so I run around the stage and jump off things. As the show warms up, we get into a groove. I'm having so much fun nowadays that I'm finding myself singing to all the songs and loving every minute of each set.

How do you prepare for AFI shows?

I don't do a ton before the shows anymore. I think being in good shape in the first place is the best way

INFO

LISTEN

AFI, *Burials* [Universal Republic, 2013]; Las Gatas Beach Club, *The Color of Summer* [postwarscience.com, 2013]

EQUIP

Bass Fender American Standard Precision Bass
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AFI, left to right: Davey Havok, Burgan, Jade Puget, and Adam Carson

to be prepared. I'm a runner, I'm a vegan—I watch what I eat, and I try to get enough sleep and generally take care of my body. The act of putting on my stage clothes before a show—which aren't too different from my regular clothes—gets me into a mind space that I'm about to put on a performance. It's like when I put on my running outfit before a run; it mentally prepares me. I switch into that mode, and that makes me excited from the time I put the clothes on to the time I get onstage.

How has your playing matured over the years?

When I first started playing, it was in a hardcore band. We couldn't find a bass player—I was on drums—so I picked it up. My initial goal was to set myself apart from other bass players by playing faster and tighter than they could. That carried over to AFI for me, but then I realized that I needed other things in my palette. So over the years I've added a lot of different things to what I do. I definitely feel like songs are a puzzle, and as I get older and have more experience, the puzzle is easier to solve. I find that a lot of the time, a simple solution can be the best solution. **BP**

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Peavey VB-MA & MA-410

BY BRIAN FOX

WHEN WE REVIEWED PEAVEY'S GAME-CHANGING VB-3 HEAD in the September '09 issue of BASS PLAYER, we were pretty bowled over by that amp's ability to deliver 300 watts in an all-tube unit weighing just 37 pounds. Achieving much of its weight loss by opting for a switchmode power supply (which requires a much smaller/lighter power supply transformer), Peavey cut the weight of the typical 300-watt tube head by half. While most tube bass heads employ a straightforward 2- or 3-band tone stack (think Ampeg, Fender) Peavey embraced a "more is more" mentality with the VB-3, stuffing it with a 3-band EQ with switchable midrange, nine bands of graphic EQ, and RESONANCE and PRESENCE controls. It also loaded the VB-3 with an overdrive channel that was harmonically rich and dynamic. In short, it was a pretty big leap forward in the otherwise old-school world of tube amps.

We weren't the only ones to take notice of the VB-3; Michael Anthony came to rely on his VB-3 rig for toothy tone and arena-filling oomph while touring the world with Chickenfoot in 2009. By working with Peavey to make some thoughtful tweaks to the amp—the ability to blend channels chief among them—and spicing it up with chili-pepper flair, Anthony has cooked up his own signature amp in the VB-MA.

Like the VB-3, the VB-MA looks like it would require the hire of some extra muscle to lug around. But with its reduced weight and industrial-strength top-mounted handles, the head is actually easy to transport. Coated in Peavey's GatorHyde polyurethane, the VB-MA and matching MA-410 speaker cabinet

have the gritty appearance of sandpaper, but the surface feels less scratchy than it looks, and is not at all unpleasant. From its rubber feet to its metal-reinforced corners and recessed control panel, the VB-MA is built to survive the rigors of the road with little worry of cosmetic damage. Given the ruggedness of all other components, I was underwhelmed by the VB-MA's front-panel knobs and sliders, which felt downright dainty on such an otherwise sturdy brute. The head's most prominent feature is its backlit red acrylic glass faceplate. At its brightest, the accent light makes a pretty bold statement; fortunately, a dimmer knob around back allows you to lower the lumens from scorching to simmer, should you want to dial things down. One final note on ergonomics: with 300 watts of power under the hood, the VB-MA is built to handle big venues and big cabinets. While the front-panel controls are easy to read at eye level (like atop an 8x10), the recessed front panel is obscured by the amp housing's overhang when viewed from above (as on a MA-410 cabinet).

SPECIFICATIONS

PEAVEY

VB-MA
Street $2,000
Pros True tube tone with half the weight; two discrete, blend-able channels; powerful, flexible EQ
Cons Loud fan; audible pop when switching; front-panel knobs and sliders feel flimsy

VM-410
Street $800
Pros An elegant match for a pretty awesome head
Cons A weighty wake-up call for those swept up in the Neo revolution

Contact peavey.com

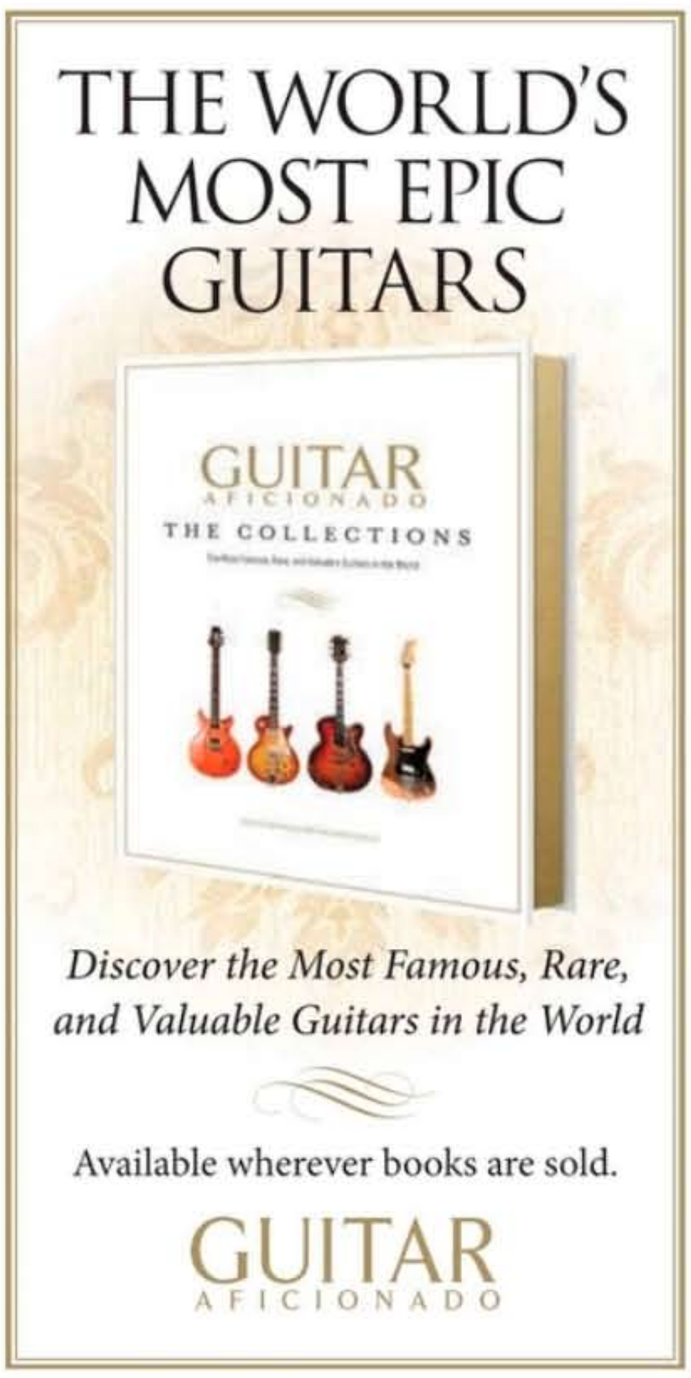
SPECS

VB-MA
Power rating 300 watts @ 4Ω
Tube complement 12AX7 x 4; 12AT7 x 2; EL34 x 8
Power supply Switchmode
Front panel ¼" INPUT, -15dB PAD, CHANNEL switch, BRIGHT switch, channel BLEND switch, MUTE, VOLUME, LOW, MID, MID SHIFT switch (200/450/600/800Hz), HIGH, OVERDRIVE, TONE, OD VOLUME, BLEND, GRAPHIC EQ switch, 9-band graphic EQ (±15dB @ 40/63/100/160/250/400/800/1,600/3,200Hz), RESONANCE, PRESENCE, MASTER
Back panel Two Neutrik combo OUTPUTS (parallel), XLR LINE OUT (with LEVEL control), effects SEND and RETURN, POWER AMP INPUT, PREAMP OUTPUT, REMOTE SWITCH, faceplate LIGHTS brightness, TUNER SEND, CABINET IMPEDANCE switch (8ff, 4ff, 2Ω)
Weight 38 lbs
Made in U.S.A.

MA-410
Speakers Four custom 10" ceramic magnet woofers
Tweeter One 1" horn with level control
Cabinet construction 12mm Baltic birch plywood
Impedance 8ff
Power handling 1,600 watts peak
Jacks Two ¼" inputs, one Neutrik Speakon
Weight 81 lbs
Made in U.S.A.

At its core, the VB-MA retains most of the guts that gave the VB-3 its glory; plugging in, it didn't take long to dial up the juicy tones we dug in the VB-3. As with so many crucial pieces of gear, it's often the little things that bring the most comfort and joy—a bright blue blinking MUTE indicator light, a single input jack with a –15dB pad switch, and an intuitive front-panel and a full-featured back panel all trigger a "right on" response. As we weren't so smitten by the VB-3's onboard compressor, the VB-MA's swapping that bit of front-panel real estate with crucial BLEND and TONE controls elicits a "right on, right ON!" Predictably, the BLEND control combines the VB-MA's clean and dirty channels. Combined with the three bands of passive EQ, the 9-band graphic EQ, RESONANCE and PRESENCE controls, and the almost-absurdly named TONE control (which sweeps from dark, creamy SMOOTH to aggressive, fizzy GRIT), it's easy to get lost down a wormhole of delicious sounds with the VB-MA.

Aside from a flat-out noisy cooling fan, audible pops when adjusting the MID SHIFT knob, and control knobs that cheapen an otherwise top-notch amp, there's a whole lot to love about the VB-MA. Like that touch of Tabasco in the étouffée or that shake of Sriracha in the pho, the seasoned heat Michael Anthony brought to Peavey's VB-MA takes it from tasty to rave-worthy. **BP**



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Epifani Piccolo 600

BY E.E. BRADMAN

NEW YORK CITY AMP DESIGNER NICK EPIFANI BEGAN WORKING ON HIS FIRST digital bass amp as far back as 1999. It wasn't until 2004, however—10 years after he opened for business—that Epifani debuted his first heads, the 600-watt UL502 and 1,800-watt UL902. These days, in addition to his celebrated UL-series cabs and aluminum-housed AL112 and EpiFunky 150 combos, Epifani offers the 400-watt Performance PS-400, the 850-watt UL501, and the 1,000-watt Performance PS-1000 heads.

The Piccolo 600, which puts out 385 watts at 8Ω (600 watts at 4Ω), hit the streets in 2009 and was refined in 2011. Engineered by Epifani and Franco Savio and designed by bassist/interior designer Romano Ferretti, the Piccolo boasts an upscale mix of warmth and stylish class. At 4.5 pounds, it's light enough to carry with a pinkie hooked through the handle, and the front panel is as user-friendly as can be, with GAIN, MID CUT, BASS, MID, and TREBLE knobs, the conspicuous but unlabeled master volume knob, and buttons for ACTIVE/PASSIVE selection, MID CUT activation, MUTE, and VINTAGE circuit engagement. The front panel's simplicity is no accident: Epifani says he was inspired to offer the Piccolo after noticing that most players bypassed the parametric EQ channel and went straight for the gain/3-band EQ/mid-cut channel of his original UL amps. Around back are a bevy of useful connections, including a voltage selector, a combo Speakon/¼" jack, a tuner out, a ¼" out for a mid-cut and mute footswitch, an effects send/return with a mix control, a ground lift, and a balanced XLR direct out with pre- and post-EQ options and level control.

I appreciated the amp being in mute mode every time I powered up, and I dug the cool blue of the illuminated "600," but once I plugged in, I couldn't help wishing the buttons felt more rugged; I found

SPECIFICATIONS

EPIFANI

Piccolo 600
Street $1,000
Pros Direct, robust tone that's easy to sculpt
Cons Buttons feel dainty

Contact epifani.com

SPECS

Power rating 385 watts @ 8Ω, 600 watts @ 4Ω
Power amp Class D
Controls GAIN, MID CUT (-8dB @ 800Hz), BASS (+22dB @ 40Hz, shelving), MID (+17dB @ 550Hz, shelving), TREBLE (+22dB @ 3kHz, shelving)
Switches ACTIVE/PASSIVE, MID CUT, MUTE, VINTAGE
Dimensions 3" x 11.25" x 10"
Weight 4.5 lbs

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myself re-pressing the ACTIVE/PASSIVE and VINTAGE buttons to make sure I'd engaged them, and I often accidently hit the ACTIVE/PASSIVE button squeezed between the input jack and the gain knob. There was also an audible click when depressing the MID CUT button while the unit was on.

The Piccolo 600's control knobs are sleek and intuitive; having a big master volume control makes it easy to reach over, turn up, and enjoy the amp's warm, defined tone. Pairing the Piccolo with my 4Ω Euphonic Audio VL-108 1x8 cab was the perfect choice for a drummer-less piano trio rehearsal; even at low volume, the amp filled the room with bass that was warm, but never boomy. Next, I connected the Piccolo to an 8Ω Bergantino HT112ER 1x12, which showcased the head's ability to pump out sparkly highs without getting too hissy, and tight lows that can keep up with a kick drum.

It was a 4Ω Aguilar GS410 4x10, however, that brought out the Piccolo's best side, highlighting great active tone from Ibanez ATK805 and F Bass BN5 5-strings and bringing to life a somewhat anemic Ibanez Soundgear SR506 6-string. The ATK's thunderous slap tone was a perfect showcase for the Piccolo's mid cut circuit, which tamed unwanted frequencies in an impressively musical manner. It was great to be able to specify the mids I wanted out—from -8dB @ 800Hz counterclockwise to "all mids in" when the knob is fully clockwise—and the green LED near gain helpfully turned red to warn me I was about to clip. Getting focused tone from a stock '61 P-Bass with flatwounds was as easy as backing off the bass and inching up the mids, but I didn't have to go VINTAGE to sound old school. The Piccolo's tasty VINTAGE circuit, inspired by the '59 Fender Bassman, added subtle low-mid roundness, not flabby tube emulation, to whichever bass I plugged in.

It's easy to see why this Brooklyn-built head would be popular among New Yorkers: it's light, loud, and versatile, and it sounds good right out of the box. If you're looking for big, clear tone from an amp light enough to carry with one finger, check out the Piccolo 600. It could be just what the soundperson—and the chiropractor—ordered. **BP**

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MARK WORLD

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Ultimate Ears 11 Pro Custom In-Ear Monitors

BY BRIAN FOX

SPECIFICATIONS

ULTIMATE EARS

11 PRO CUSTOM IN-EAR MONITORS
Street $1,150
Pros Custom fit, fast and clear low end, ambient noise cancellation
Cons Clarity comes at a price

Contact pro.ultimateears.com

SPECS

Input sensitivity 119dB @ 1kHz, 1mW
Frequency response 5Hz–22kHz
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Noise isolation -26dB
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Warranty 1 year limited
Made In U.S.A.

THERE ARE THE ESSENTIAL DEVICES WE NEED TO PLY OUR TRADE AS BASS players: instrument, strings, amp, cable. Anything beyond that, from straps and gig bags to stomp boxes and beyond, is in some ways ancillary. Not so with the most important tool of all, the ear. With its custom-fit earplugs and in-ear monitors, Ultimate Ears offers a range of products designed to treat your earhole right, whether as noise cancellation, in-ear monitoring, headphones, or all of the above.

The first step for any in-ear system is getting a mold. In this case, Ultimate Ears offered free molds at Bass Player LIVE!; UE also maintains a database of recommended audiologists on its website. Once a mold is on file, specialists can create any number of earpieces, from Earplugs ($170) to the dual-driver 4 Pro ($400) to Personal Reference Monitors ($2,000). At the higher end of the UE product line, the Ultimate Ears 11 Pro boasts the best bass response, courtesy of a three-way crossover and a four-speaker configuration comprised of dual-driver subwoofers, a designated midrange driver, and a high-frequency tweeter.

The mold process is quick and painless, a 10-minute affair in which a hardening putty is inserted into your ear canal while you hold a bit between your teeth to keep the canal open. There is mild discomfort in the procedure, as more molding material is inserted into the ear canal than will be used to make the mold. (In other words, the finished product is more comfortable than the molding itself.) Aside from custom fit, Ultimate Ears offers a range of colors and graphics for the earpieces and caps; the design you see here comes from a stock graphic lifted from the Internet.

The finished monitors, which ship in a rugged engraved aluminum case, arrive with a detachable 48" braided cable with sheathed memory wire at the earpieces (for wrapping up and over the ear) and a gold-plated right-angle ⅛" plug. Once inserted into the ear, the earpieces sit comfortably, even for extended periods of time. With 26dB of passive ambient noise cancellation, wearing UE Pro 11 molds is a sensory-altering experience in itself. When the monitors begin to transmit sound, things get intense. Calling up songs in iTunes—even in their compressed MP3 format—the Pro 11s deliver with a clarity that allows you to hear details that are lost with lesser headphones. Using the Pro 11s while brushing up on material I had previously studied extensively, I couldn't help but feel as if I were hearing these familiar songs for the first time. An overdose of low end can be exhausting—especially with earphones—but I felt none of that fatigue with the Pro 11s, owing to their clear and focused bass response. Because of the ambient cancellation, playing along with an unamplified bass doesn't work well; I found it most effective to change my audio playback source to mono and remove one earpiece to play along. As for use through an amp's headphone jack, the Pro 11s are eye-opening, conveying nuances of touch and tone that vanish with many other headphones.

At $1,150, Ultimate Ears Pro 11 monitors are a luxury, without a doubt. But when viewed as a long-term investment in our most valuable asset—our ears—they are a completely justifiable expense. Simply put, whether on stage or on the subway, UE Pro 11s allow you to hear bass as it is meant to be heard: clearly. **BP**

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WHAT DID BOOTSY SAY ABOUT THE BASS BOOST FUZZ?

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The Bass Boost Chorus avoids seasick tones through a specially-tailored design. Detune adjusts the pitch of the choral voices, adding sonic girth to create thick, lush, bass-perfect chorus.

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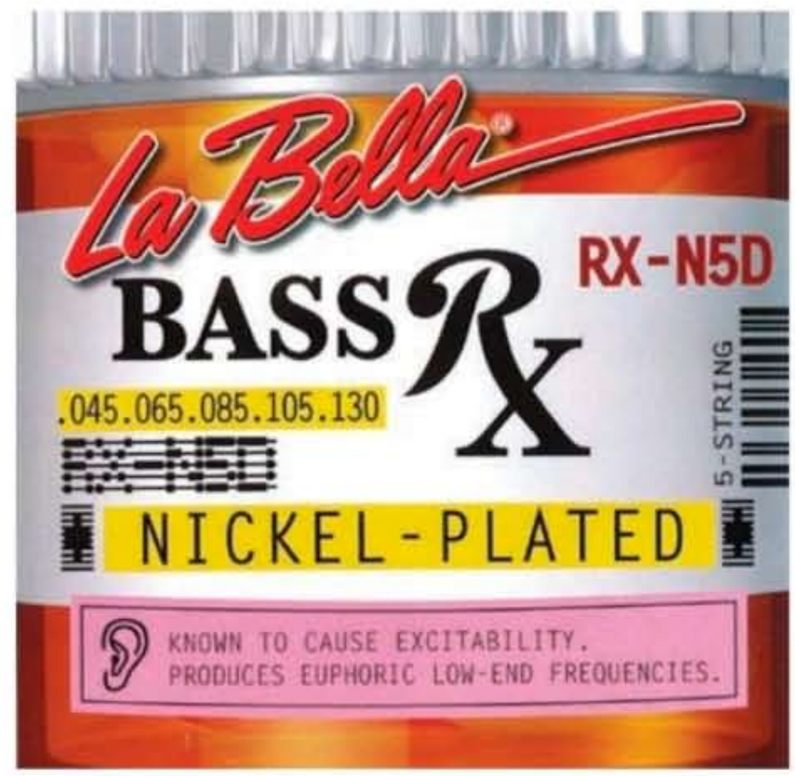
Headline courtesy of Jimmy Knowles, winner of our Facebook Photo Caption Contest.



La Bella
RX-N Strings

BY BRIAN FOX

WITH WHAT CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED AS A DIVERSIFIED PORTFOLIO, La Bella has built a following among bass players with its its variety of strings. From Deep Talkin' Bass strings that recreate the heavy flatwounds favored by James Jamerson to high-output Super Alloys and heavy-gauge Drop Tunes, La Bella's catalog runs the gamut. That variety expands this year with its RX-Series strings. With RX, La Bella sought to refine the recipe of its SN-series nickel (formerly known as Slappers) and M-series stainless steel strings by using a hexagonal core and high-quality American-made wire and gauging the string sets for lower tension. RX strings are available in Nickel-Plated or Stainless Steel, for 4-, 5-, and 6-string, and in four different gauges. In La Bella nomenclature, a letter at the end of an RX-Series set model indicates gauge: "A" for .040–.060–.080.–.100; "B" for .045–.065–.080.–.100, "C" for .045–.065–.080.–.105, and "D" for .045–.065–.085.–.105. For testing, I opted for the heavier "D" gauge on both 4- and 5-strings.

There is no silk wrapping at either end of the RX strings, and the wire wrap extends from within an inch of the ball to the end of the string. With 36" of outer winding, the RXs fits both Fender-style 4-string and 3+2 5-string headstocks on 34"-scale basses, and would fit many long-scale basses, as well. Though anyone selecting a string based solely on the silk thread at either end might want to reexamine their priorities, I confess that without the silk, the RXs seemed lacking in the vibe department when I strung up my basses. Once tuned and ready, the RX-N's true traits begin to show: the nickel plating does much to temper the clang of steel and helps soften the finger feel. Tension on the heavier-gauge "D" strings is less than I would expect; notes sound firm, and you don't have to work too hard to get them. The tension is far from floppy—vibrato requires conscious effort, and you need a bit of muscle to get a good bend in.

Fresh out of the bag, the RXs tend toward the mellow end of the tone spectrum. On the 5-string tester set, the strings seemed to lose life in the lower register. Without multiple 5-string sets, it's hard to know if that was just a bad *B* string (hey, it happens with the best of them). At any rate, if *zing* is your thing, you might check out the RX Stainless Steels or some of La Bella's brighter offerings.

Because it's such a popular string type, the nickel-plated roundwound landscape is a pretty crowded one. But with so many variables in string composition—core, wrap, gauge, materials, construction—there's a lot of room for variety. For those seeking a warm sound, medium-low tension, and smooth finger feel, the RX-Ns might be just what the doc... just what you're looking for. **BP**

SPECIFICATIONS

LA BELLA

RX-N Strings
Street 4-string, $27; 5-string, $37
Pros Mellow nickel-wound sound; smooth finger feel; medium tension
Cons Low strings can sound muffled

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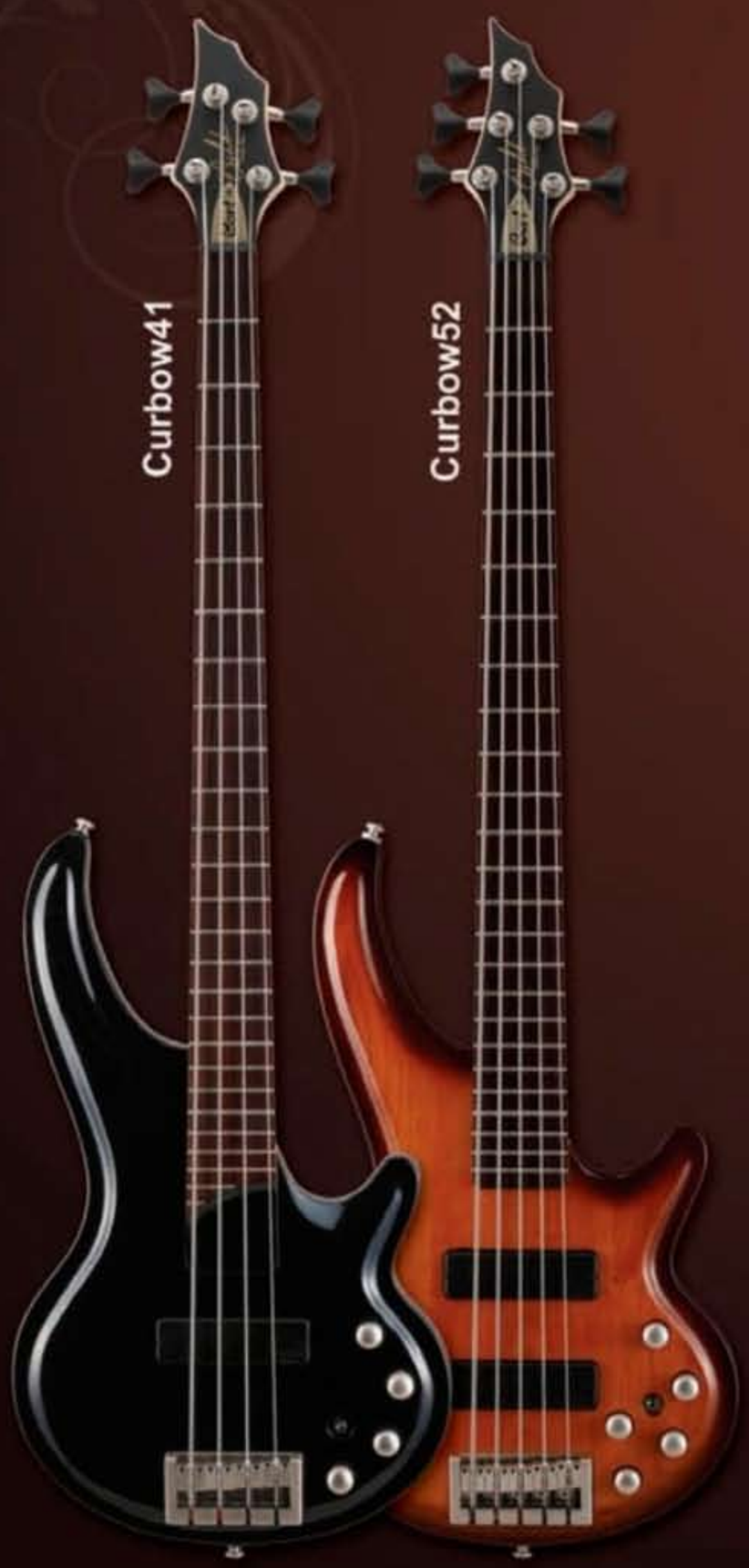

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JAZZ CONCEPTS

A 6th Sense For Melody

BY JOHN GOLDSBY

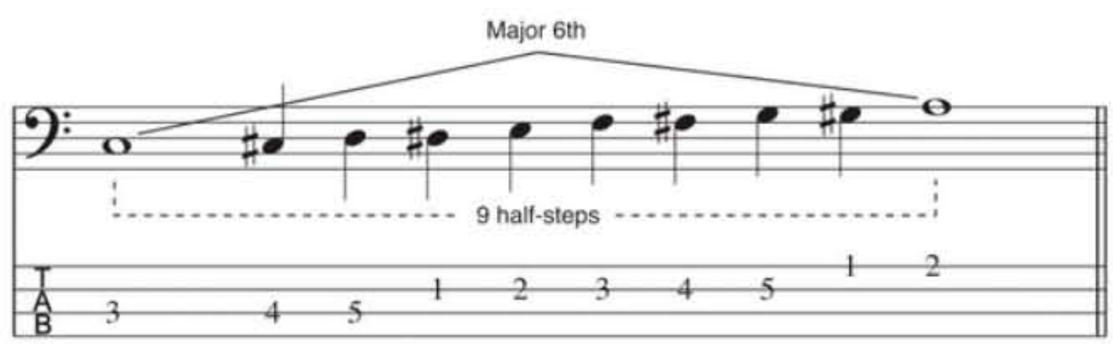
WHY DO SOME BASSISTS PLAY MORE MELODICALLY THAN OTHERS? It's not that they possess a 6th sense—a mysterious talent channeled only by mystics and bass gods. Their well-kept secret? They've mastered the fundamentals of music technique and theory. Melodic bassists have a good command of wide interval jumps—6ths and 7ths—and these large intervals make for compelling, melodic lines. Intervals are the building blocks of music, and you can improve your playing by learning to use intervals in a musical way.

Intervals of 6ths and 7ths usually require crossing over two strings, or shifting positions, so they are harder to grab on the fingerboard than smaller intervals like 2nds, 3rds, 4ths, and 5ths. But the 6th interval is useful to have under your fingers all over the bass. Practice large intervals and you'll develop your 6th sense for melodic playing!

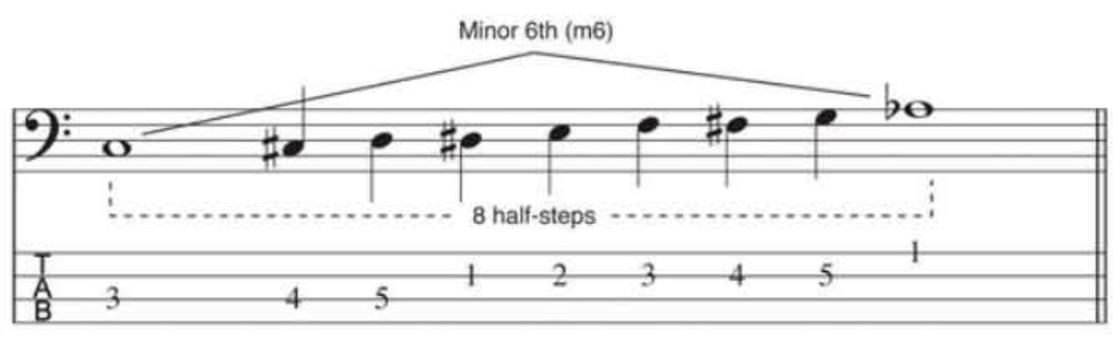
There are two types of 6ths that you should know. The interval of a major 6th can be determined from any note by counting up or down nine half-steps (**Ex. 1**). The interval of a minor 6th is found by counting up or down eight half-steps (**Ex. 2**). Play a major scale in broken-6th intervals, and you'll see and hear that some of the intervals are major 6ths and some minor 6ths (**Ex. 3**).

Bass lines, solos, and chords can all be analyzed by the relationships between intervals. Intervals that are played successively (one after the other) are called *melodic intervals, horizontal intervals*, or *linear intervals*. Two notes played simultaneously, such as the notes in a chord, or in a double-stop on the bass, line up vertically and are described as a *harmonic interval* or *vertical interval*.

EX. 1



EX. 2



INFO

JOHN GOLDSBY

Discuss all aspects of bass playing with John at the musicplayer.com LowDown Forum. Also visit John's website at **johngoldsby.com** for sound files, videos, and bass-related material.

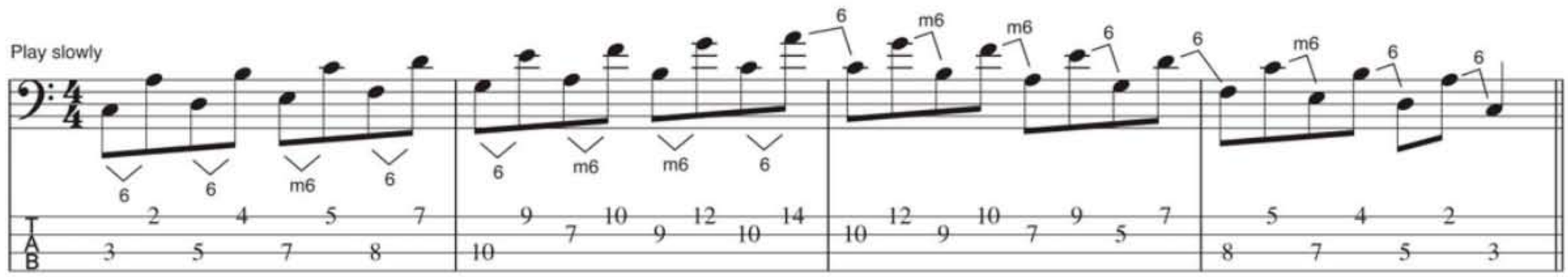
CONNECT

- Sing along and learn intervals with the wild and wacky Django Bates.
- Play the interval game, the interval trainer at musictheory.net.
- Hear John Goldsby's solo on Thelonious Monk's "Misterioso," chock full of 6th intervals. **bassplayer.com/february2014**

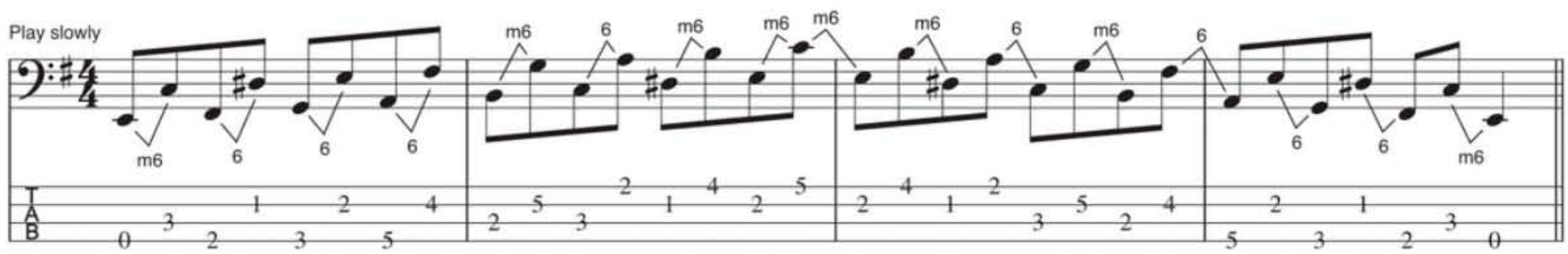
A minor 6th interval can also be named an augmented 5th, depending on the key signature and how accidentals are used. For example, a *C7♯5* contains a minor-6th interval between the notes *C* and *G♯*. An *Fm7* chord also has a minor-6th interval between the notes *C* and the *A♭* above it; the *G♯* and *A♭* in both chords are the same pitch, but are written differently to fit the harmonic construction. Similarly, the minor-6th interval sounds the same, whether it is *C* to *G♯* or *C* to *A♭*. The *A♭* and *G♯* are called *enharmonic equivalents* (two spellings of the same note). The intervals *C* to *A♭* and *C* to *G♯* are both minor-6th intervals, even though the notes are spelled differently, and the notes function differently in each chord.

Continued

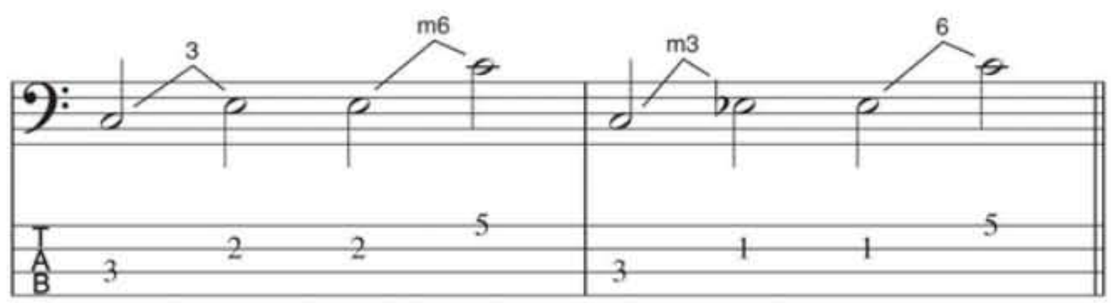
EX. 3



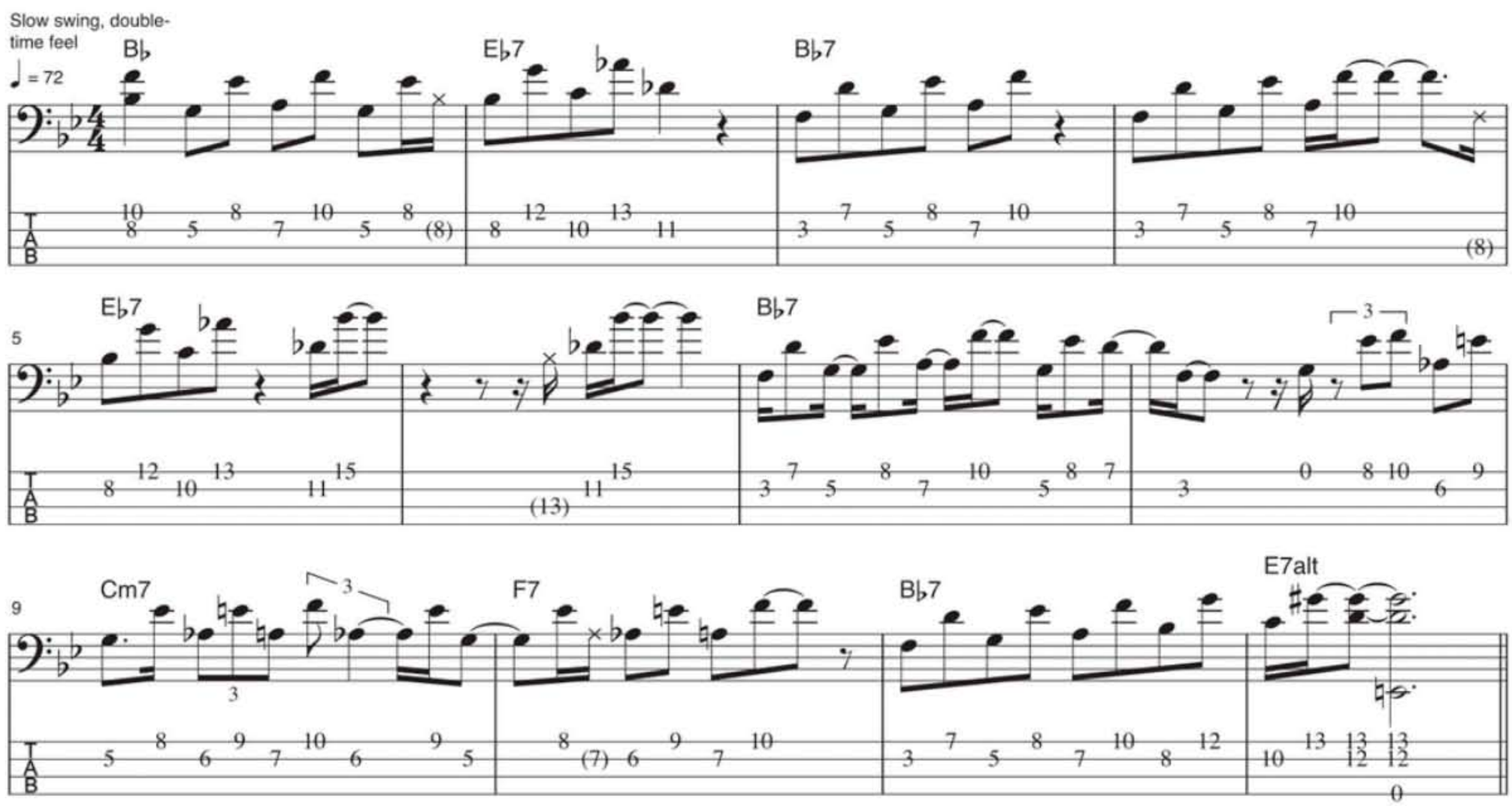
EX. 4



EX. 5



EX. 6



You can play any scale in 6ths, like the *E* harmonic minor in **Ex. 4**. Apply this exercise to some of the scales you already have under your fingers. If you're used to playing scales up and down diatonically or in 3rds, this exercise will force you out of your comfort zone and into a world of melodic leaps and bounds.

The inversion of a 6th interval yields another melodic friend of ours, the 3rd. **Example 5** shows that the major 3rd interval (notated as "3") between the notes *C* and *E*, when inverted, becomes a minor 6th (m6) interval between the notes *E* and *C*. The minor 3rd (m3) interval between the notes *C* and *E*♭, when inverted, becomes a major 6th (6) interval between the notes *E*♭ and *C*.

Example 6 is an excerpt from my solo on the *B*♭ blues "Misterioso" [*Live at the Nachbar,* Bass Lion 2008, bass solo starts at 3:40]. Alto saxophonist Jacob Duncan ends his solo with a quote of the original Thelonious Monk melody, which is based on 6th intervals. For my bass solo, I pick up on Duncan's idea and play the entire first 12 bars only using intervals of major and minor 6ths. I use two proven devices for building an interesting solo: quoting from the melody, and repeating musical phrases. I am referring to the original melody, but also altering some of the rhythms for a surprise effect. The glue that holds this solo chorus together is the combination of minor-6th and major-6th intervals.

Learning to play melodic bass lines and solos is not hard, once you've mastered some basic technical and theoretical material. By using 6th intervals in your lines and solos, you'll open up your playing, and become known as a melodic bassist. Develop your 6th sense! **BP**

Sound Familiar?

Learn To Recognize 6th Intervals

Many common songs begin with an interval of a major 6th or minor 6th. You can train your ear to recognize these intervals by listening to songs and recognizing the first interval of the melody. Start by singing the interval to any of these melodies; then pick up your bass and match the pitches. This is great ear training on a very practical level.

Songs Beginning With Major 6th Ascending

"All Blues"
"Days of Wine and Roses"
"Misterioso"
"My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean"
"Speak Low"
"Soul Man"
"Take the A Train"
"When Sunny Gets Blue"
NBC Theme

Songs Beginning With Minor 6th Ascending

"In My Life"
"Manhã de Carnaval"
"The Entertainer"

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Antoine Dufour
April Wine
Audioslave
Avenged Sevenfold
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Backstreet Boys
The Band
Barbra Streisand
Bare Naked Ladies
Barry Manilow
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Bela Fleck
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Britney Spears
Bruce Springsteen
Bruce Swedien
Bryan Adams
Buddy Guy
Butch Walker
California Guitar Trio
Casting Crowns
CeCe Winans
Celine Dion
Charley Pride
Cheap Trick
Chicago
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Decemberists
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Derek Trucks
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Disney
Dixie Dregs
Dolly Parton
Donna Summer
Donny Osmond
Doobie Brothers
The Doves
Dream Theater
Duke Robillard
Duran Duran
Dwight Yoakam
The Eagles
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Franz Ferdinand
Garbage
Gavin Degraw
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BLUES YOU CAN USE

Willie Dixon, Part 3

Slap Soloing

BY ED FRIEDLAND

IN NOVEMBER 2013, BASS PLAYER GAVE A POSTHUMOUS LEGACY AWARD TO WILLIE DIXON. At the BASS PLAYER LIVE! concert/awards ceremony, his grandson Alex Dixon was there to accept the award on Willie's behalf, and I was amazed at the family resemblance. As a young man, Alex had the opportunity to gig as a keyboard player with his grandpa, and he told me, "I was too young to be nervous about who I was playing with." The concert featured Stones bassist Daryl Jones leading an all-star tribute to Willie's music, with guest appearances by Don Was and Jerry Jemmott—and while laying it down was the order of the day, each player took a turn at soloing

INFO

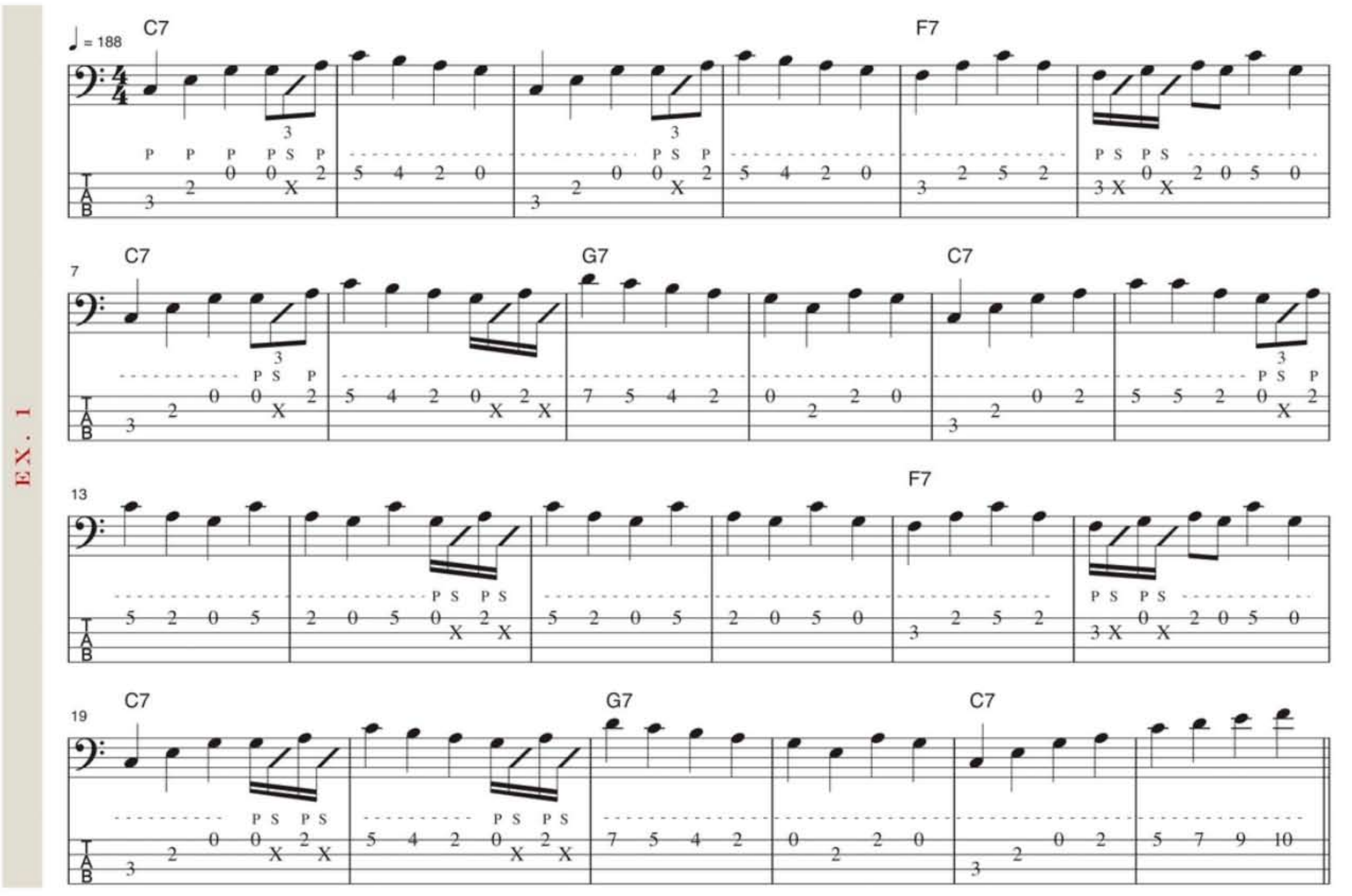
ED FRIEDLAND

Ed "the Bass Whisperer" Friedland plays, writes, and teaches out of his bass base in Austin, Texas. **edfriedland.com**

LISTEN

Memphis Slim and Willie Dixon, *Songs of Memphis Slim and Willie Dixon* [Folkways]

EX. 1

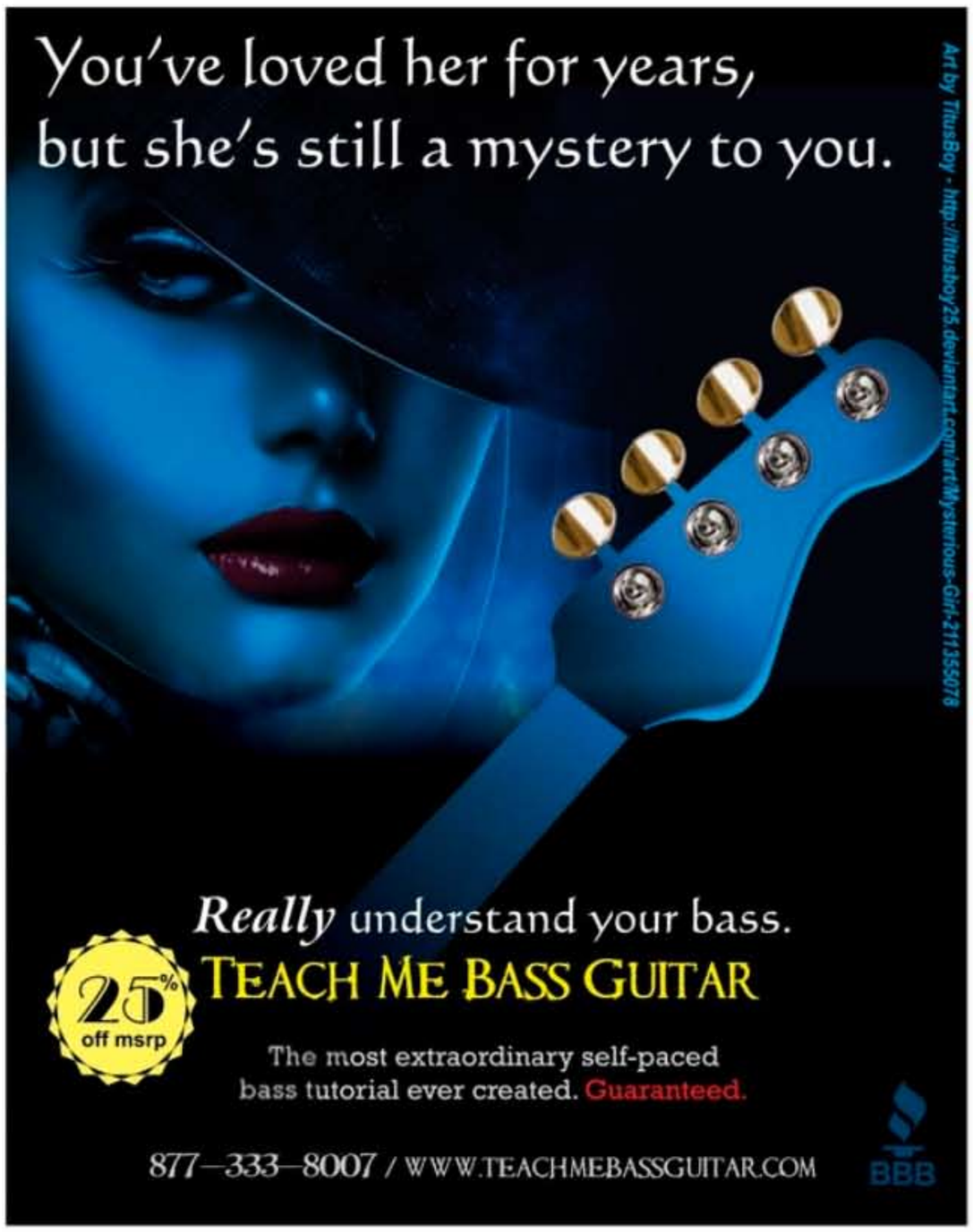


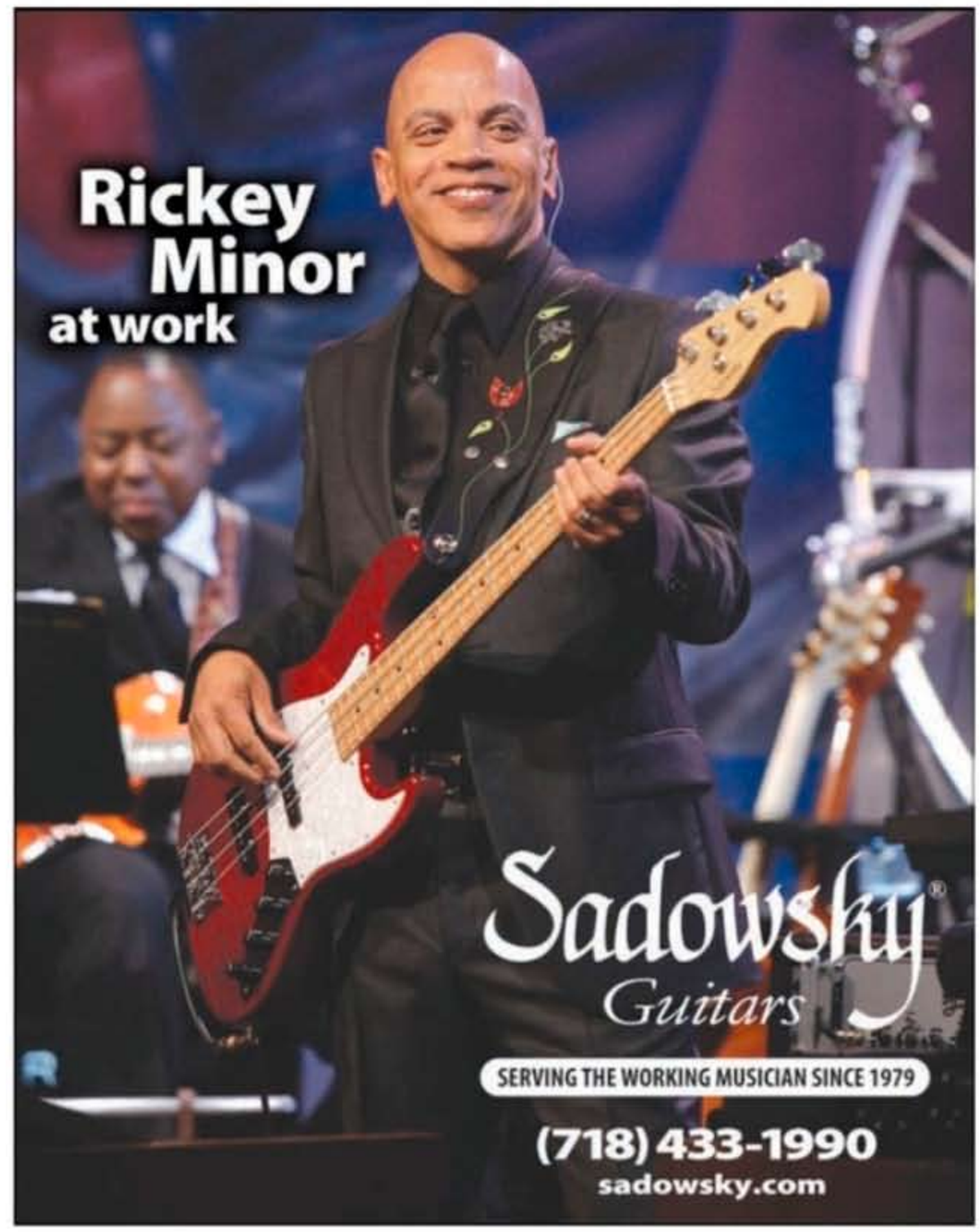
on the blues. While bass solos are not a mainstay of the genre, Mr. Dixon himself was quite the dynamic soloist, using his formidable slap chops, sheer chutzpah, and sense of humor to leave a lasting impression. There's no way anyone could not dig a Willie Dixon solo!

Here are the first two choruses of Willie's solo on "Joggie Boogie," the track featured in last month's column. While there are no frets on the upright bass, the example is tabbed as it would be positioned on the upright bass neck. All quarter-notes are plucked by grabbing the string with your index and/or middle fingers, pulling on the string, and releasing it to smack against the fingerboard—much like the string pop in funk/slap technique. The fast triplet and 16th-note slaps are played more with the side of the hand than the flat of the palm. It's an approach used by jazz players like Milt Hinton that facilitates fast walking lines with the slap technique. The slap itself is a by-product of bringing the hand back into place for the next pluck; don't think of it as hitting the fingerboard. In this example, Willie pulls a few trick runs that really stun at 188 BPM; the triplet slap in bar 1 is a little different in that the last beat is plucked instead of slapped, and he repeats it in bar 3. On the IV chord, he climbs up and down the triad and adds a quick 16th-note blast in bar 6—he's really just plucking eighth-notes, but the slaps falling in between create a double-time rhythm. Willie utilizes these two rhythmic devices throughout the first two choruses, and continues on to take several more choruses (on two separate occasions) until the end of the 3:28 track.

The end of the second chorus ends with Willie climbing the ladder up to the fingerboard's nosebleed section for the next few rounds. He hangs around thumb position—still producing a tone that could drive a band—and drops back to earth to accompany Memphis Slim through several more hot choruses of boogie-woogie. On the second run through Willie's solo, you'll notice he plays almost the exact same thing as the first time, but once he drops back down from the higher realms, he unleashes a slap barrage that carries the two out to the big finish.

Willie Dixon was not only an important architect of rock & roll and a pioneering poet of the blues, he was a bass player of monstrous ability who influenced generations of players—not in the least this month's cover artist, Lee Rocker. All hail Willie Dixon, the Pillar of the Blues! **BP**





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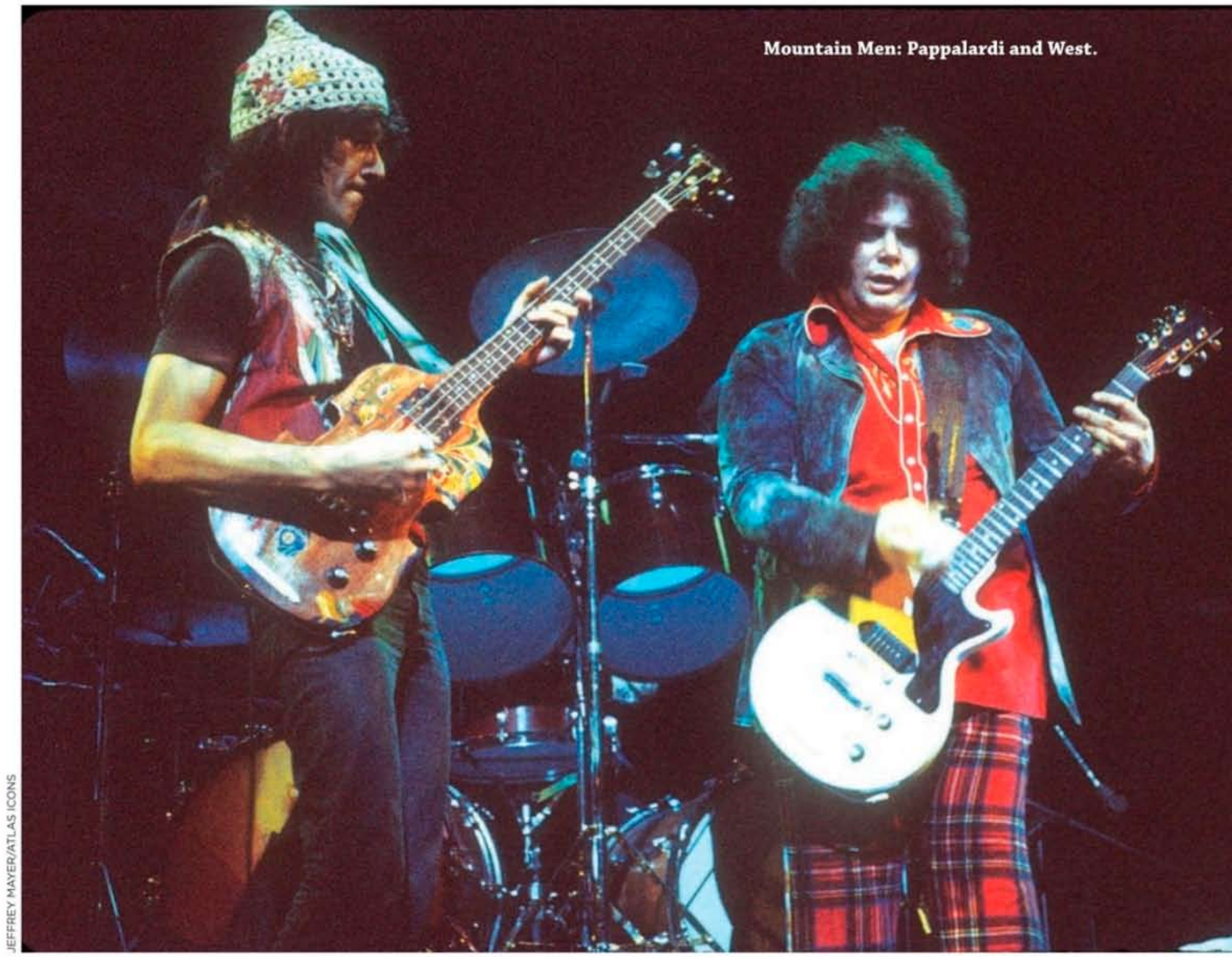


Mountain Men: Pappalardi and West.

JEFFREY MAYER/ATLAS ICONS

"Nantucket Sleighride (To Owen Coffin)" By Mountain

Felix Pappalardi's Complete Bass Line

BY FREDDY VILLANO

BASSIST, COMPOSER, SINGER, AND PRODUCER FELIX Pappalardi was born December 30th, 1939 in the Bronx, New York, and began studying music at the age of five at the Diller-Quaile School of Music. At 17, he graduated from New York City's High School of Music & Art, where he studied the viola. He then went on to study brass and strings, with emphasis primarily on orchestral and choral conducting, at the University of Michigan. Pappalardi first gained recognition in the rock world as a producer, especially for his work on Cream's *Disraeli Gears* [ATCO, 1967]. It was Pappalardi's production work with the Vagrants that introduced him to his future Mountain band mate, guitarist/vocalist Leslie West. Together, the two would forge the proto-metal sound of such classic songs as "Mississippi Queen," "Theme for an Imaginary Western" and "Nantucket Sleighride (To Owen Coffin)."

After Mountain officially broke up in 1975, Pappalardi mostly continued to produce. In 1976 he released *Felix Pappalardi & Creation* [A&M] with Japanese hard rock band Blues Creation, and in 1978 he released a solo album, *Don't Worry, Ma* [Polygram]. He died on April 17, 1983 when Gail Collins, his wife and longtime writing partner, shot him in a domestic dispute.

Pappalardi was known for his monstrously thick bass tone and his ability to bend strings on his Gibson Electric Bass like wet spaghetti noodles. [Note: the violin-shaped Electric Bass manufactured from 1953–58 would be reissued in

1968 as the EB-1. After Pappalardi's original bass was stolen, his request to Gibson for a replacement reportedly influenced the decision to re-issue the bass.] "I just love it," Felix told *Guitar Player* in April 1972. "Particularly the weight. I really like having a heavy instrument in my hands. It has more powerful pickups, too. And it only has two knobs. I want it all as simple as possible—nothing between me and my playing." Felix strung his bass with heavy Dan Armstrong strings, which he rarely changed. "Once they get broken in, I leave them as long as I can," he told *GP*. He would also remove most of his bass's hardware, so he could "have as much room to get around as possible." For amplification, Pappalardi relied on a Sunn amp system he claimed was first designed for Jimi Hendrix and further modified by Mountain tech Tom Lyle. "I really don't know what he did," said Pappalardi. "Something to do with the top, I think. I'm really not all that into the electronic thing. As long as I have the bark, the attack that I like, everything is fine."

For many musicians who've worked with Papparlardi over the years, including former guitarist Andrew "Duck" MacDonald [Blue Cheer] and drummer Bobby Rondinelli [Rainbow, Leslie West] the single biggest determining factor in Pappalardi's tone was his left hand. When Felix was born, the middle two fingers of his left hand were fused together. Though he had an operation to separate them, his third finger was never as flexible as the others. "It's been like that all my life," he told *Guitar Player*. "It does give me tremendous power in those middle fingers so I can bend strings easily."

According to Leslie West and latter-day Mountain bassist Rev Jones [see page 18], tuning also had a lot to do with Pappalardi's tone, and Mountain's overall sound. "Certain songs have tuning issues where they're just a little bit out." says Jones. "It creates a weird tone that you can't really capture live. On top of that, Leslie told me that Felix liked to use dissonant notes. Listen to "Blood of the Sun" [Leslie West, *Mountain*, Windfall Records, 1969]. One of them is playing a *C*, and the other is playing *B♭*. The dissonance between those notes makes it sound unique. It's like when you listen to Stevie Wonder sing. A lot of the time he's sharp and flat on purpose, because he's hearing the notes like that. If everything were perfect it would sound terrible."

"I remember learning "Nantucket Sleighride" off of a vinyl record," Jones recalls. Jones mostly improvises the bass lines when playing Mountain tunes live, keeping in the spirit of tradition. "I don't think they ever played a song the same way twice." There are, however, a couple of sections where he stays pretty true to what was recorded. "When I see a band perform this song, it's that bass line during the verses that makes or breaks it," he says. "In my opinion it's the coolest thing that could ever be played over that vocal melody. It's hard to describe the bass part—the rhythm is very precise like it's programmed, but at the same time it's very loose and open—like a human groove. I think that's what makes it vibe the way it does. Felix always seems to play a lot of three note patterns, but not in a triplet feel, which creates a lot of space." **BP**

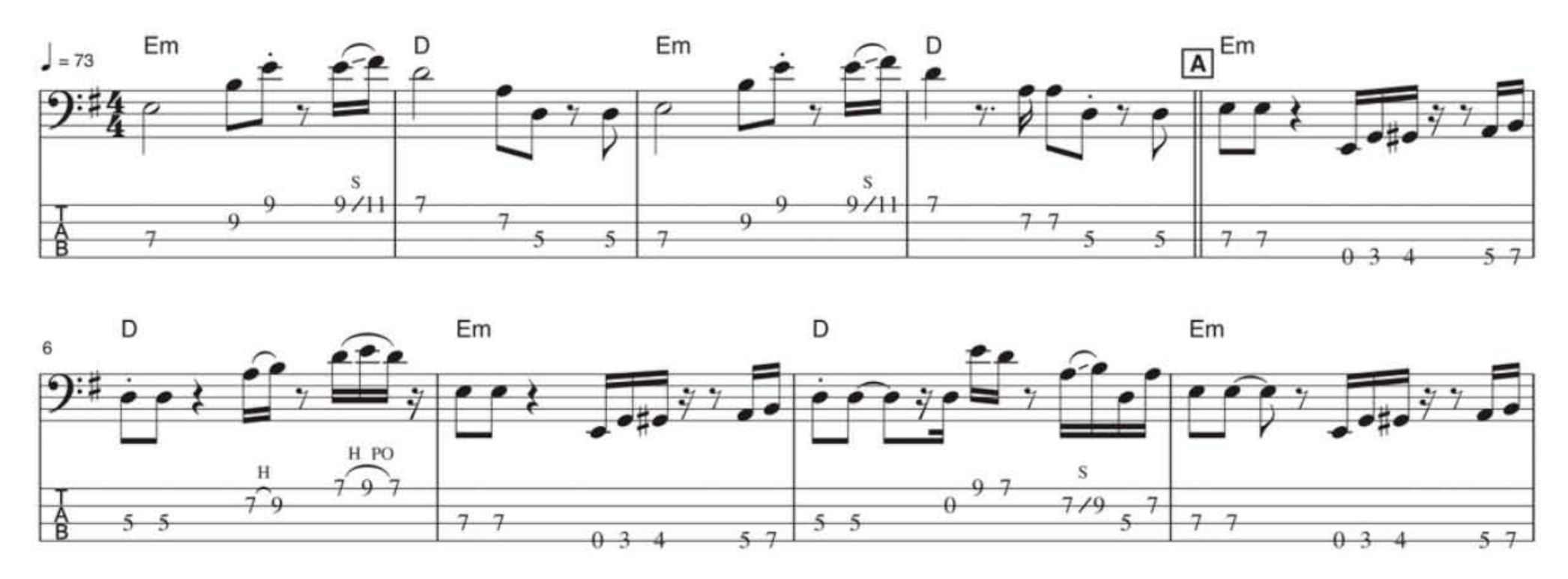
INFO

LISTEN

Mountain, *Nantucket Sleighride* [Sony, 1971]

"Nantucket Sleighride (To Owen Coffin)"

Transcription by Brian Fox



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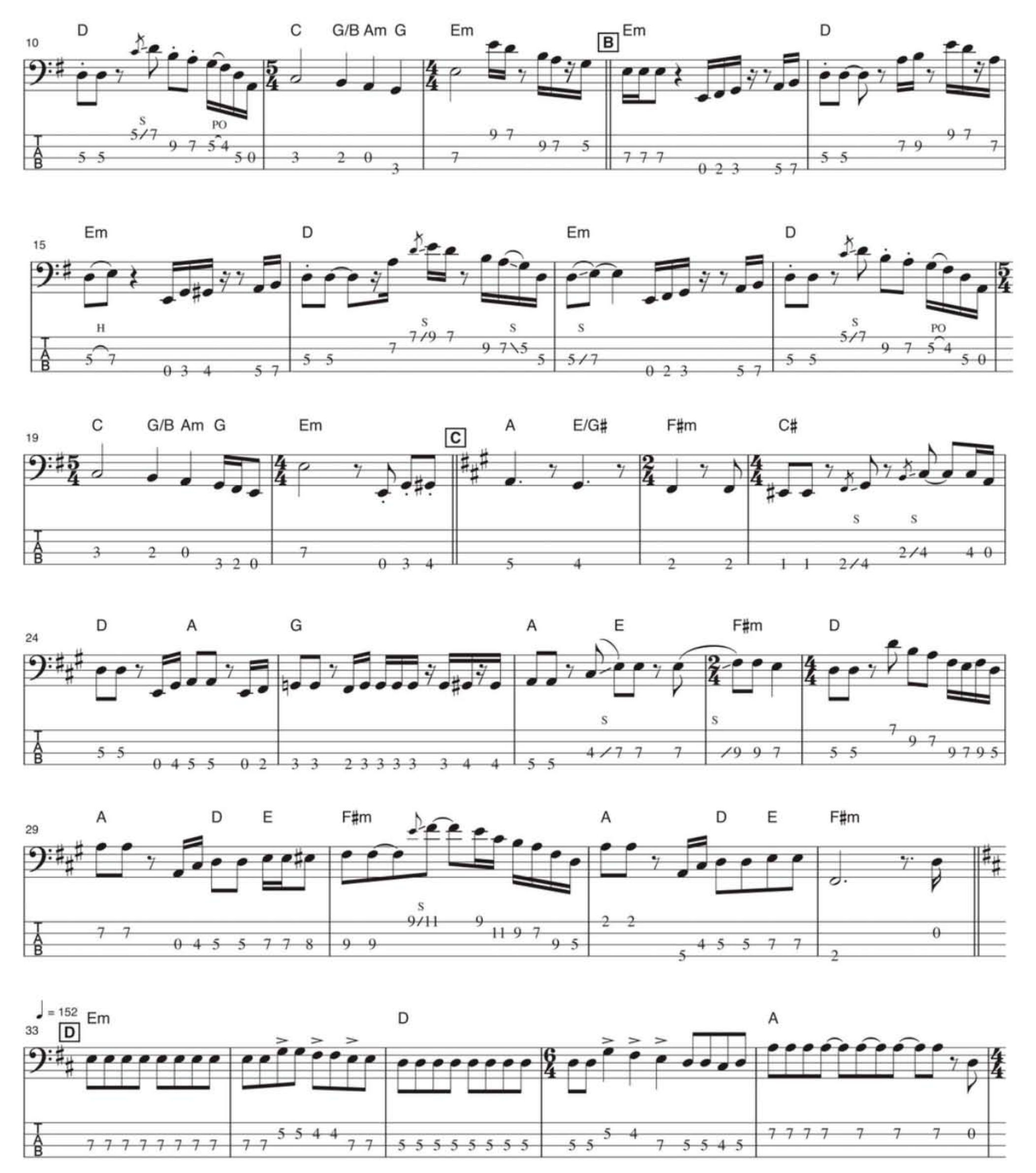
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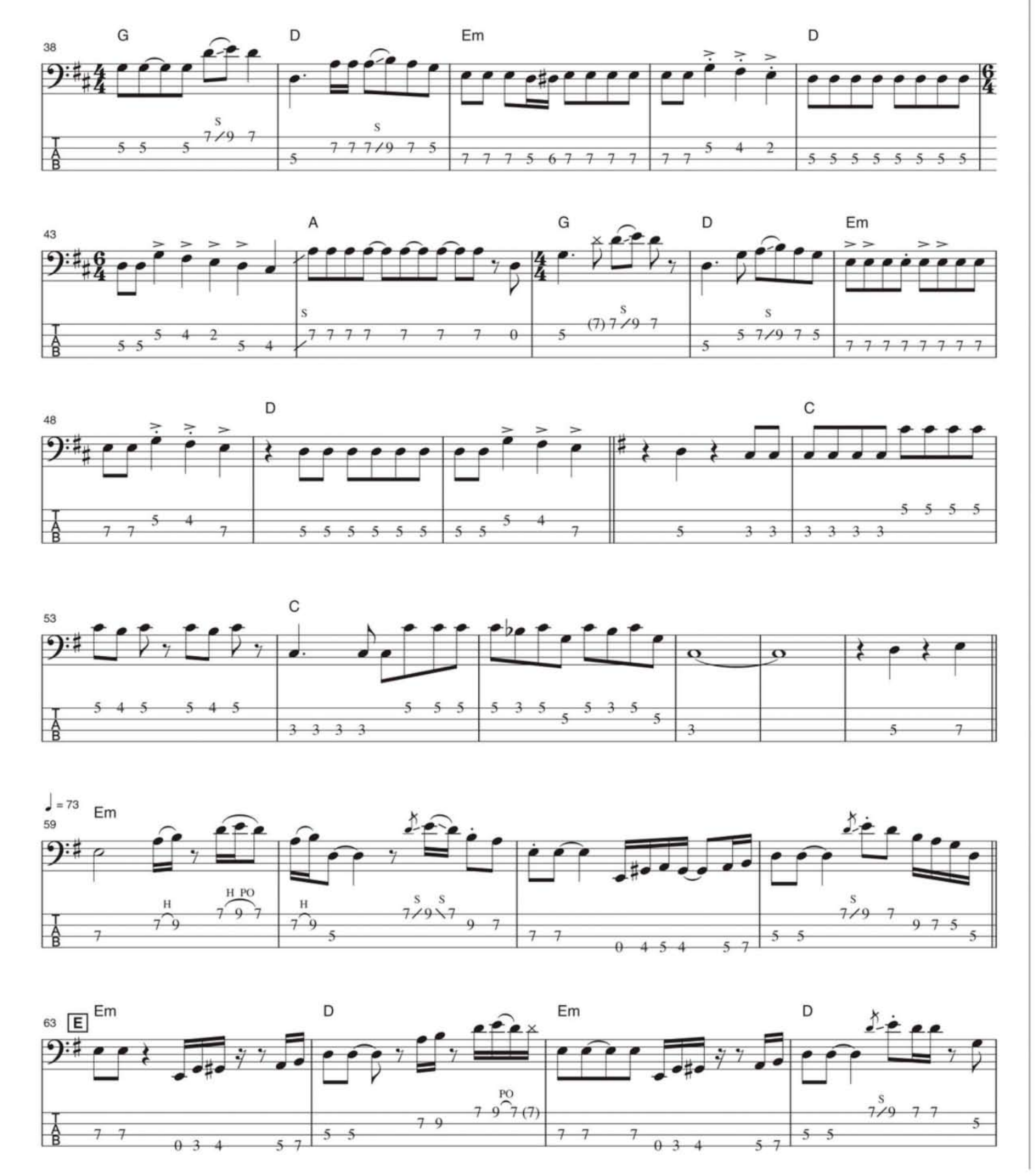
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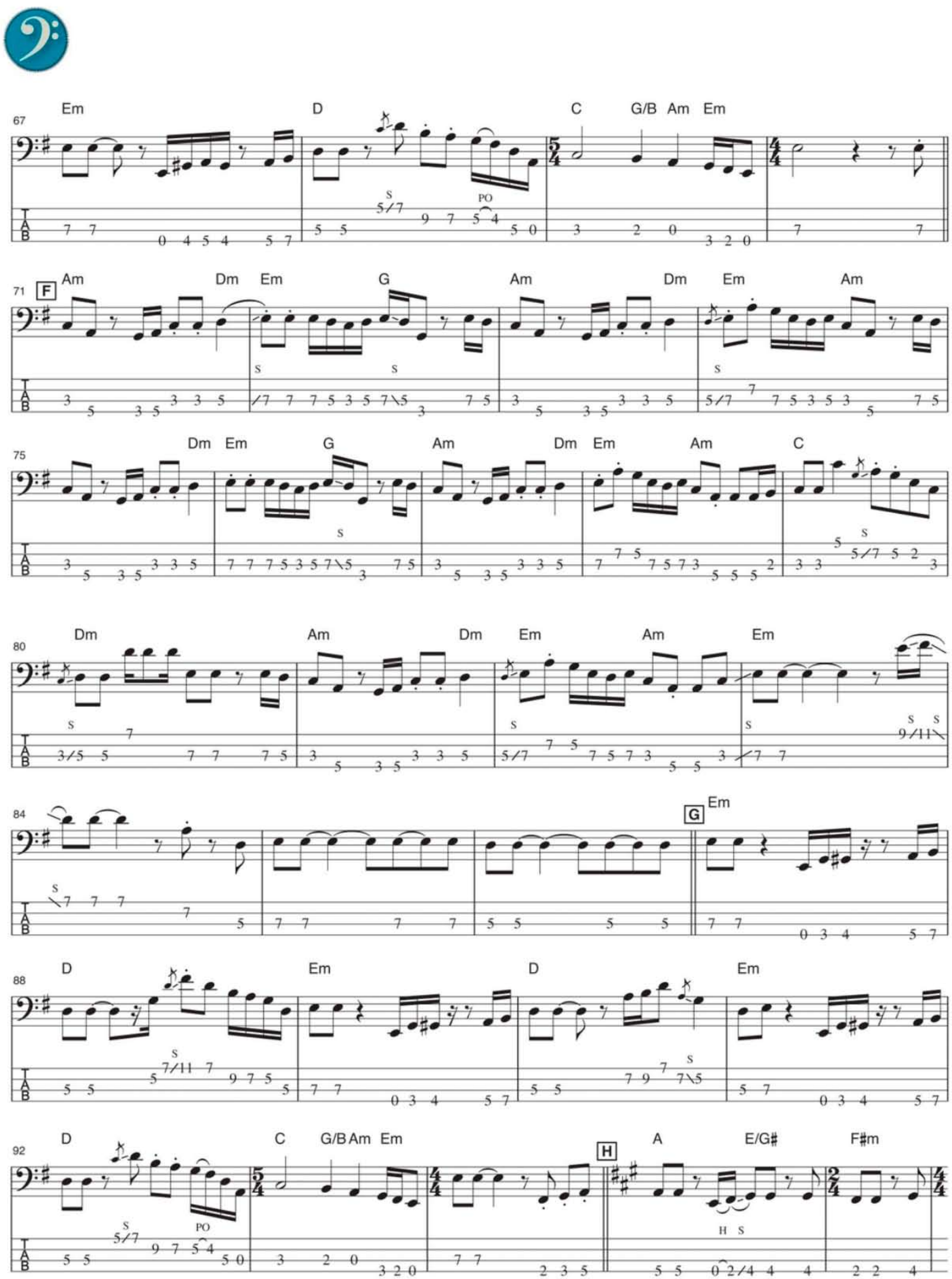
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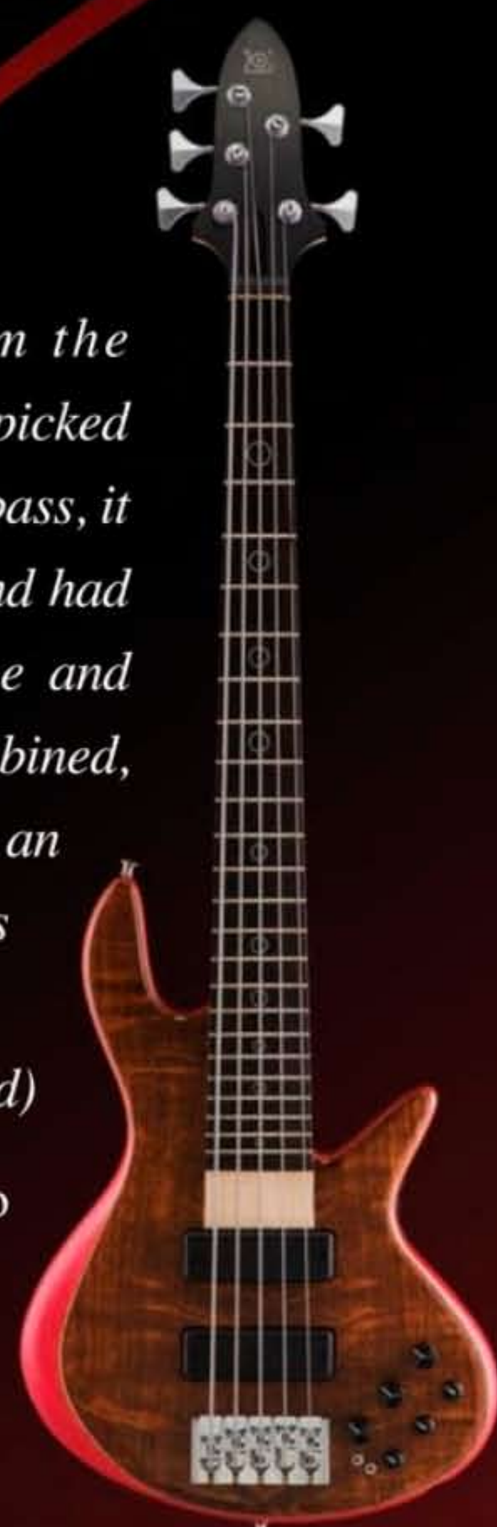

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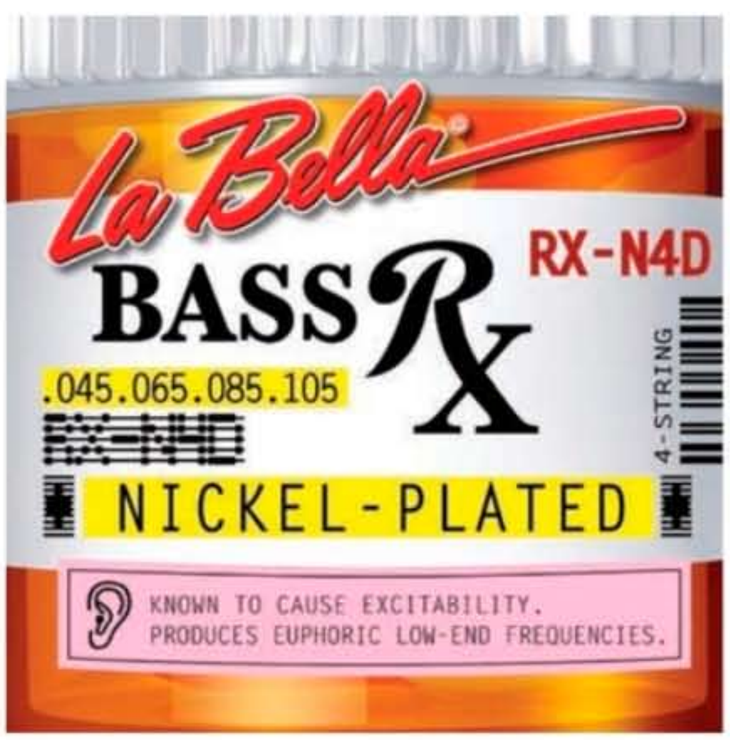

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BOBBY'S BASSMENT

The Shark Bass, Part 2

WELL, NOW I HAD MY STACKED-POT '61 JAZZ Bass. I wanted more out of it, though. I had part of the equation, but I needed that extra piece of chicken. In the meantime, I was playing the '65 Jazz Bass I got in 1972, but that's another story.

So I called Glen Quan. The basses he modified for Larry Graham were the best Fender Jazz Basses I'd ever heard. They had bottom and a sweet mid, with the smoothest high end ever! He was always the best around to make your bass or guitar get up and do the boogaloo. I told him I wanted a little more out of my bass, and asked what I could do. He told me to come on over.

I went to Glen's house and he said he'd make me some pickups. And he did—from scratch, right in front of me. He would finish a set, put them in my bass, and say, "Play!" And then, "Nope!" He'd take them apart and start all over again, filling a garbage can full of wire. About eight hours later, he got this look on his face after I played two notes, and so did I. Glen had made me some of the best-sounding pickups ever. That was the day I started to have A Sound. After that, I only played My 1961 Jazz Bass.

I was trying to get that Jimi Hendrix thang going on, so I'd play gigs with a concho belt I used to wear. I was really digging in and sweating, and shit, it took the finish right off the back of my bass. I knew I was f'ing it up, but I didn't care (I was a dummy). So I asked my friend Billy Stapleton what I could use to protect the back of my bass. Billy said he had just the thing, went out of the room for a minute, and came back in with a shark decal like the ones you'd see back in the day on camper shells, trailers, and R.V.'s. He looked at it, sized it up, and put it right on the back of my bass. *Tadah!* The Shark Bass was born. Man, it looked cool! My friend Martin Fierro, a sax player, was the first one to call it the Shark Bass. Martin passed away in 2008, but I can still hear him say, "Hey, how's the Shark? Chut up!"

One of the many gigs I played with the Shark Bass was with Etta James & the Roots Band on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson in November 1989. Headlining the show that night was the one and only Milton Berle. "Uncle Miltie" was Mr. TV, the King of Television during TV's golden age. We walked in and I saw him doing his soundcheck, and all I can say is, school was in. I thought it would be cool to get his autograph.

After the show, I see Mr. Berle leaving and all the paparazzi are around him.

Here's my chance. I say to myself, Fuck it. Go for it!

"Mr. Berle, would you please sign my bass?"

He looks at me and says, "All right, kid. Where do you want me to sign it?"

I flip the bass over.

"Okay, I'll sign it on the fuckin' fish."

The Shark Bass has opened a lot of doors and introduced me to people and places I could have only imagined. Besides many gigs with the great Etta James, the Shark Bass has accompanied me onstage with Paul Butterfield, Lydia Pense & Cold Blood, Jerry Garcia, Carlos Santana, Tower Of Power, Jefferson Starship, Mickey Thomas, Booker T., Billy Preston, Zero, KVHW, and so many others. When I play back the tape in my mind, lots of memories and images run—some happy, some sad, and there's some "oh, shit" times, too. I've spent most of my life with the Shark. This bass is a part of me, and I'm a part of it! —BOBBY VEGA

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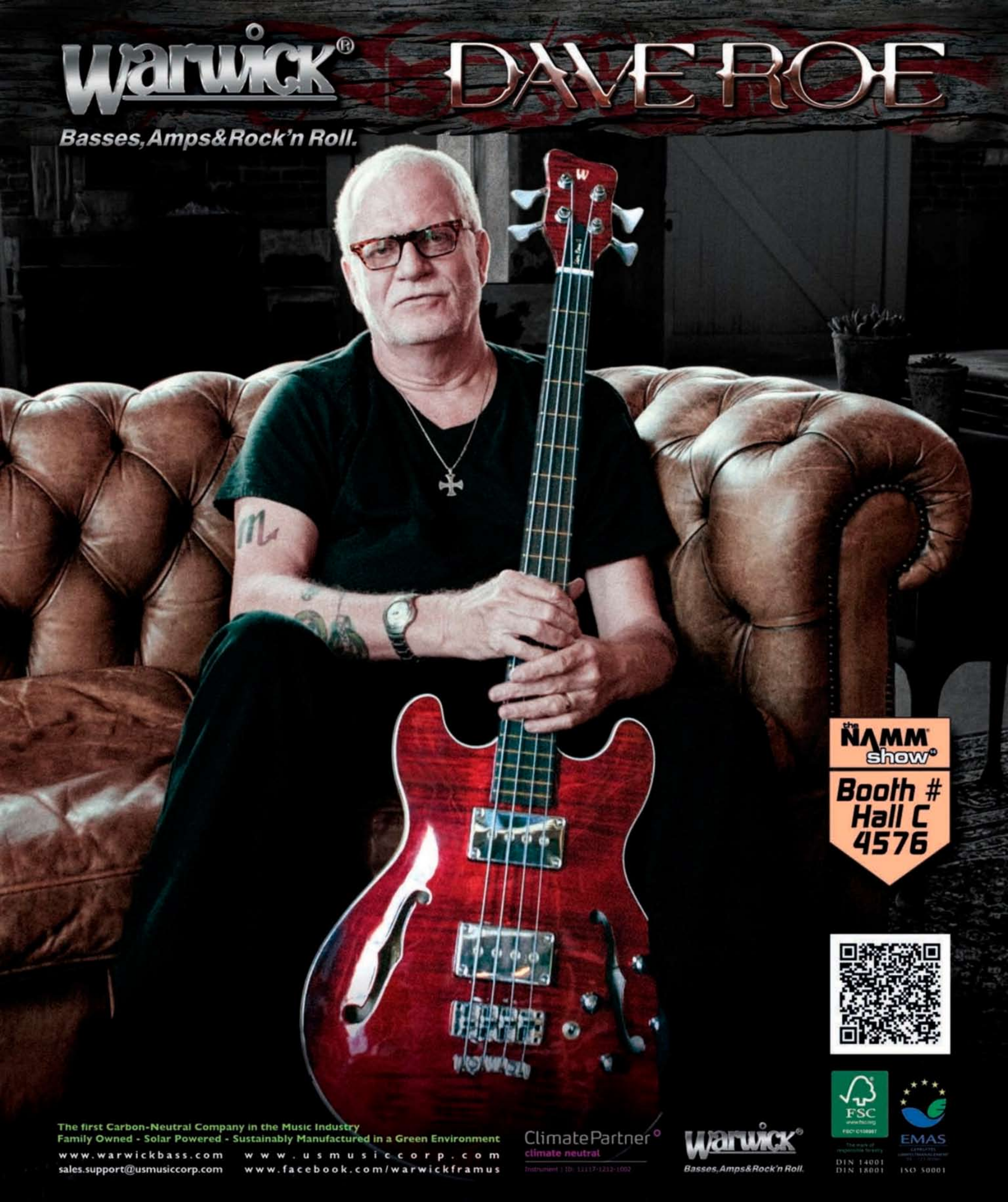

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